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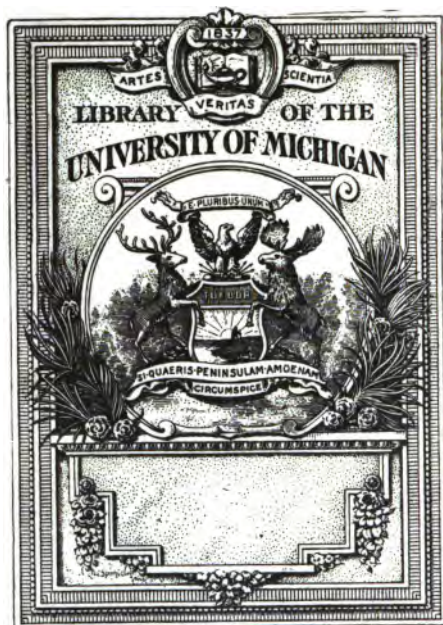
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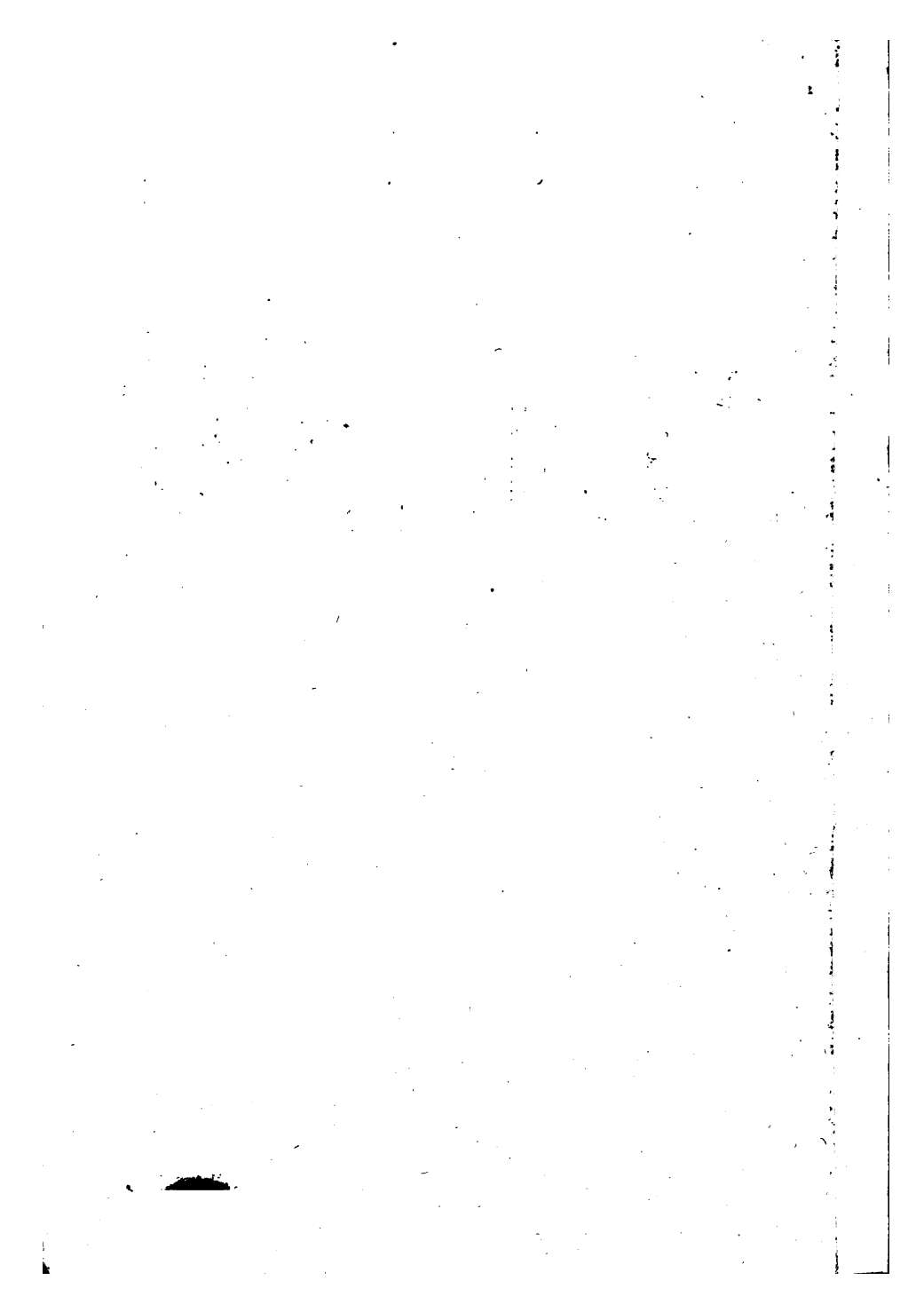
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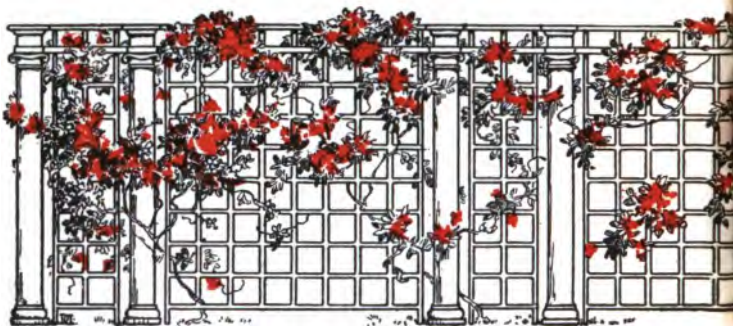
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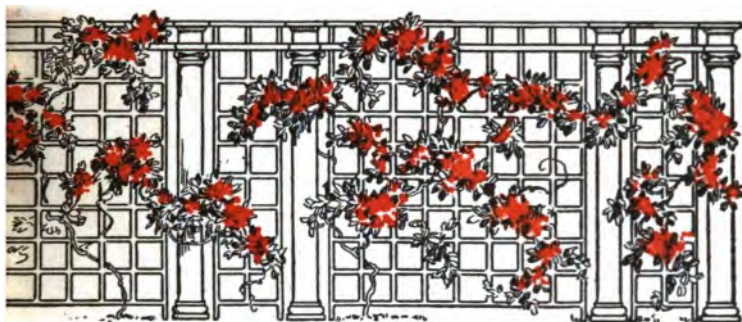


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BY

BOUCK WHITE

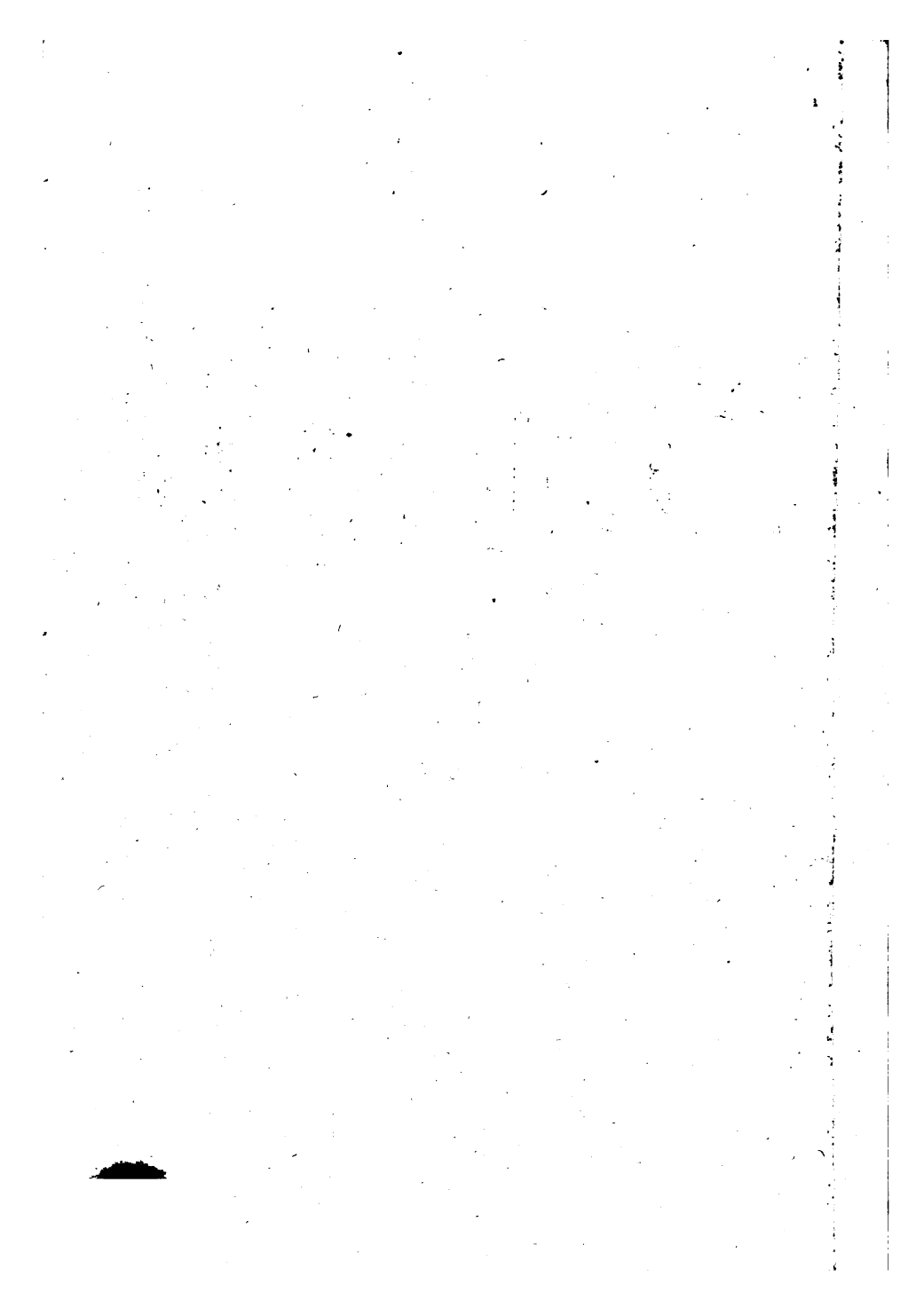
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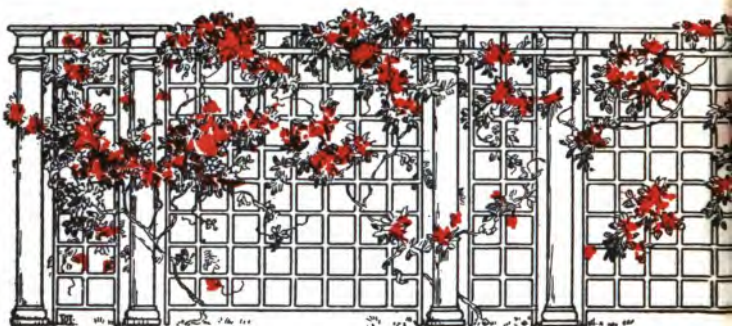
WHAT THE HILLPORT , NEIGHBORS DID ,



GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
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THE MIXING

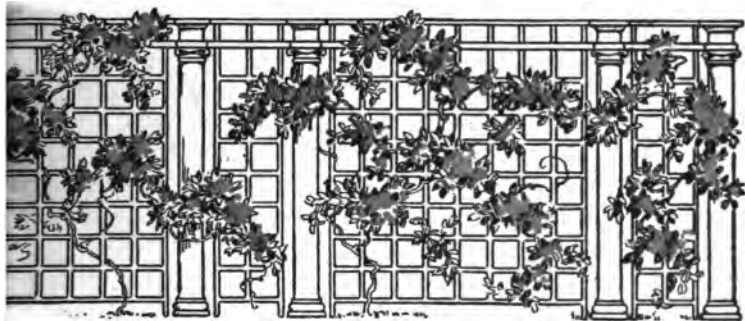


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BOUCK WHITE

Author of
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THE MIXING



CHAPTER I

GEORGE DAGNER was alone.

Physically alone, for one thing. He had climbed up on to The Cliff, the sharp bluff that overlooked Hillport, and there he had been musing through most of the day. He was unaccompanied, and sat, hands clasped around knees, on the edge of the rock all solitary, contemplating the scene below him where lay his labours as minister of the Hillport church.

But also in a deeper sense Dagner was alone. For he was lonely. That was why he had come up away from the village, to this secluded spot.

The loneliness of soul within him craved isolation; quiet wherein to think things over.

Not that Hillport was noisy; belching forth any clangour wherewith to smite the nerves of him and drive to hilltops for quietness. To the contrary. "The Rip Van Winkle of the Plain" was far and wide the town's nickname. "A place where nothin' never happens," Bill Van Wormer of the Bassler store "Cracker Barrels" was wont to remark to his fellow cronies around the stove.

Fact is, it was just this stagnancy of the situation that put its pressure desolatingly on Dagner's spirit. For George Dagner was a chap with ideals. He had entered the ministry five years before, brimming with energies. Three years at Union Seminary had given him his technical equipment. A call to the Hillport church had thrown wide open before him the doors of opportunity.

That is, so he had thought, two years ago. Why should this not prove quite the field to bring out his power, show the stuff that was in him? To be sure — and the committee had apprised him fully of the facts — it was a run-down church in a run-down neighbourhood. But he was not afraid of difficulties. And certainly there were factors that promised success. Here was a community of nigh a thousand souls. Rich farming land. And a summer population, the "city

colony," attracted hither by its country air, the water-scape, and its not-too-great remoteness from the City; City with a capital; huge, vast, thundering thing, whose smoke and dust made Hillport's upland air a bath to the lung-lobes with every respiration. Moreover, some of these summer people were beginning to make the town their year-round residence, particularly since the railroad had put on a fast train night and morning to encourage the commuter habit. Yes. It was a promissory field. And Dagner had entered upon it with vim.

But disillusionment arrived. Dagner would not have minded the general run-downness of the place. To tackle a job where his predecessors had failed, build up a dilapidation — that was a prospect quite to his taste. But he found before long that there was no material to build with. It's all right to put together again a brick house that has fallen into a ruinous heap. But when the bricks themselves have pulverized into a dust-heap, it spells a different situation.

Hillport — Dagner faced the truth with a bitter resoluteness — was not a piece of clockwork the human wheels and cogs of which were out of gear and needed but a skilled and patient hand to get back into running order. The metal itself of which the parts were composed was old, cor-

rupted with rust through and through. "Shouldn't wonder a bit if you was right," had remarked Brother George Vroman to Dagner's pessimistic groan; "yes; the country districts do seem to be done for. And why not? We're old. That's what's the matter with us. Everything gets old after a while. And it isn't any use then trying to tinker it back into soundness."

Dagner had made a fight. Had visited at every house in town. Had preached his best. No one could say that he had neglected to cultivate the vineyard committed unto him. But the people were refractory to his efforts. As a last resort, this past winter he had imported a singing evangelist. A two-weeks' "campaign" it was. The very latest advertising devices had been employed by the evangelist, who prided himself on being a press-agent expert. "You could make a fortune as a publicity man," some one had said to him once, greatly to his elation. All the latest dodges were in this visitor's repertory. But somehow the people had not responded. And the after effects were dispiriting; for the failure had left a depression upon the few faithful ones.

Yes. Dagner had failed. No use trying to disguise the situation. He was at the end of his rope. He had tried everything, and without results. There was nothing left for him to do but

give up his post. Perhaps another, more capable than himself, might ——

His reveries were interrupted by a woman's voice back of him: "No, no! Don't go in that direction. You'll fall off. That's right. Keep in the path."

Dagner recognized the merry notes. It was Mrs. Corbin of the commuter colony. And peering through the bushes, he saw her approaching along the path back from the edge of the rocks, with her twin boys, two active lads of ten, looking for wintergreens. Dagner was in no mood for company. Therefore he sat still, trusting to the bushes to screen him where he sat out on the projecting ledge.

His stratagem was succeeding. They were passing him by, unregarding, when suddenly one of the twins, Max, called out to his mother: "Oh, Momsie, there's Mr. Dagner on a rock all alone," and started for him. The other lad, Davie, followed suit. Concealment was at an end.

"Boys," said their mother, holding each by a hand on the edge of the rock, and her voice was shot through with laughter; "boys, this has been very, very rude and naughty of you to have disturbed Mr. Dagner in this way. Don't you see, he doesn't wish us to be here. He preferred to be

alone. He ——” She caught a sight of his face. She stopped short. The laughter went out of her eyes and her voice together.

Dagner noticed the abruptness of her pause. Tried to pass it off with a gayety, as he smoothed out his collar — where the boys in their greeting of him had rumbled it. But Mrs. Corbin’s serious mien abided.

“Come, laddies,” said she with sudden decision. “I’ll fix a stone house for you to build back there on that level spot, while I rest for a little space here with Mr. Dagner.” So she drew them back to a safe distance from the edge, piled some stones in a circle, with a gateway, and told them to finish it and build a big stone fort on that foundation. Then she came back and seated herself on the rock with Dagner:

“Yes, I know it’s boorish in me to intrude. But you’re in some sadness or other. And are all alone in this town. You never come to see us as you used to. Therefore you mustn’t mind if I come to you.”

“And do you know why I don’t come to see you any more?” spoke up Dagner, a sudden desperation of candour in his tones. “It’s because I’m ashamed to. You and Mr. Corbin are about the only ones of the summer colony who come to church any more. And I know why you continue

to come. It's out of pity. Oh, now, don't deny it. Not since I've been here have you got any help from the service. You continue to come, out of the big charity of your heart. I'm a failure. That's what I am. And it isn't decent in me to hold on to the job a week longer. For I'm keeping somebody out who might have it in him to fill the post, meet the needs of this community."

"You think, then, Mr. Dagner, that it is merely a matter of personality, this question of the church and the country districts. And that Hillport is in a somnolent condition because of you. Your predecessors, forsooth, solved the problem amazingly. Did they? And other rural towns, where George Dagner's blighting presence has not been, are now in wide-awake condition?"

"Then it means nothing less than this," replied Dagner, the bitterness in his tones only to a slight extent mellowed: "if neither I nor any one else is equal to the task, the rural problem is impossible of solution. In which case, it's all up with us. Because the country supplies the red blood for the city. Cut off the springhead, you cut off soon or late the stream which flows therefrom. That's a bitter alternative. Better permit me to continue my dream, that some other man, more possessed of gumption than I, can tackle the job; than to say that the job is impossible."

"But why choose either horn of that dilemma? May it not be that a third way out might be found?"

Dagner's look leaped to her with a sudden animation: "What is there left to try? I've exhausted my ideas. I didn't have very many of them to exhaust, I admit. The theological schools don't seem to recognize the existence of a rural question. They taught me the farming problems of old Palestine. But how to tackle a country proposition here in Twentieth Century America, — why, they clean forgot that; left me to flounder around unguided. Floundering? Yes, that's what I've been doing. And I'm at the end of my resources. I'd try anything that I thought had a ghost of a chance."

"No," said Mrs. Corbin, looking down on the village, and speaking with a meditative air, as though thinking aloud. "No, it isn't this or that device that is going to solve the difficulty. Of course, I'm only a learner along with you, Mr. Dagner. But I've lived here longer. It has been simmering in my mind over a greater stretch of time. And it seems to me that what is needed in a village like this is a new spirit. There is just as much force generated in country people as in city people. But it isn't utilized; that is, it isn't coördinated, unified. Rural folk haven't learned

teamwork. Look down on that village. What's the one trouble with Hillport?"

Dagner looked in the direction she pointed, but shook his head despondingly.

"I'll tell you what's the trouble," she continued. "We people down there don't pull together. There is an enormous amount of personal energy being developed. But it is not being put to creative use. There is no community sense."

"But how does this help my problem?" put in Dagner. "All that you say may be true, Mrs. Corbin. But my job in life is religion. And the shoemaker must stick to his last."

"Which is quite what I have in mind," said she. "This problem of our rural districts is one of religion. Only, it must be a different spirit of religion from the one now understood and practised. That evangelist, for instance, whom you had here last winter! Do you know, I think it a blessing his efforts failed. Yes. Don't look shocked. Listen to me. If he had succeeded, he would have made the people more individualistic than they are now. And the Protestant churches already are individualizing the people to death. It's each man for himself, and damnation to the hindmost."

"Then that means you are leaning toward the Roman Catholic communion," said he. "They

teach the absorption of the individual into the mass."

"No, I'm not leaning to them," insisted Mrs. Corbin; and her tones took on an increased assurance as their talk progressed. "What Hillport needs is religion. But it must be something different from both Protestantism and Romanism. Romanism's ideal is that of a community presided over in its every activity by priests, and moulded into ecclesiastical forms; society, one big church; even the locomotives on the railroad track painted with the effigy of some saint, and decorated with a bishop's mitre; the church absorbing everything. You Protestants, reacting from that, have emphasized the importance of the individual; and in so doing have saved him from being swallowed up by the human mass. But in so doing you have forgotten the social. So that, wherever Protestantism has prevailed, an intense individualism has burst forth. Are you following me?"

"Am trying to."

"Look at Hillport," and she waved her hand thitherward in a sweeping gesture. "The farmers have no sense of the oneness of this region as an agricultural unit; no thought that they are raising the same crops under the same conditions, and shipping to one and the same market. Each is going it alone. The village people are in a like

mental state. Each one is living his life of and by himself, forgetful of the fact that fully three quarters of our existence is social instead of personal. The commuter colony likewise is in the same benighted and belated mentality. You see, I am not putting all the blame on the villagers. We who are from the city are just as backward. We too have got the idea that life is an individual thing. Whereas the biggest part of it, if we only had the bigness of brain to see it, has to do with the community as a whole. The young men whom Hillport breeds — the pick of them — catch the self-centred spirit; leave the town as soon as they get big enough; go off to make their own fortune; and deprive the town of their abilities and leadership. And what shall awaken in us a community consciousness? Religion. Nothing else is of power to prevail over the terrific selfishness — that is, the terrific littleness — of all of us. But it must be a civic religion. Neither Protestantism nor Romanism, but a third and new brand, the religion of democracy — to the end that a man's avarice may be for civic aggrandizement instead of for himself."

She paused for him to reply. When no word came, she continued:

"Did you ever stop to think of it: the things we all use in common are more than the things we

use separately. The railroad, the post office, the roads, the sidewalks, the school, the water front, the balloting booth, the air we breathe, the climate, the beauty of the earth, the light of day and the stars overhead by night, the hour-hand on the dial, the march of the seasons. Social possessions, all of them. We are heated by the same sun, chilled by the same wind, plagued by the same insects, jeopardized by the same infections, wrought upon by the same temptations, haunted by the same fears, shadowed by the same death. The great values in life, the high lights as well as deep shades, are social rather than individual. Is there not a need in every community for a voice that shall persistently, Sunday by Sunday and in the ministrations of the week, magnify unto us these so many and great things that unite us, and which shall declaim the paltriness of the things that divide us?"

Mrs. Corbin again waited for an answer. She went on:

"You cherish the importance of the individual. Maybe it is foolish in me. I too have been cherishing a dream of that kind also. But my individual is Hillport. In my day dreamings I see her a united and harmonious organism; hands and feet and brain and organs each serving the other, each served by the other, each recognizing its

dependence on the other. In our bodies beauty is the harmony of all the parts, and whose pleasant interplay is gracefulness. For a limb to move by itself, with no thought of the rest, is St. Vitus dance, and all ugliness. Hillport at present has that disease. Her differing members move at random; no coördinating centre. But in the Hillport of my dreamings, this chaos of form and motions has been done away. As I visualize her, she is beautiful because her parts are proportioned one to the other; and graceful because these parts move each with reference to the other. And her name goes forth as the fair one, the queen that sits beautifully in her garments of white and green and gold."

"Momsie, look, look!" cried Davie, coming over with a stone in each hand, his eyes aglow with the pleasure of creating something. "We've got the fort built up as high as our knees. And loop-holes in it. Everything. Come, look; before she topples over."

"Thank you, Davie, for reminding me," said his mother. "It's time we were going home. See how low the sun is."

Dagner held out his hand, assisting her to arise. Accompanied her to inspect the fort the twins had built. Then, to Max, as he said good-bye to the three: "Max, it was mighty good of you to spy

me out on that rock as you three were going past. The other two were going on by, were leaving me all to my lonesome. An unneighbourly thing to do. Truth is, Max, I wouldn't have missed this visit for ever and ever and ever so much. And I owe it to you. Spy me out every time."

"Oh, Max is a wary scout; can spy people through bushes and rocks and everything," remarked his mother. And they resumed their way along the path.

Dagner remained. He went back to his solitary post on the rock. He sat himself down as before, and gazed out over the valley. But he did not seem so alone as he had been before. Something new was germinating within him. His eyes had a fire in them, betokening the enkindlement of thought in the deep chambers of the mind.

The sun went down. Twilight came. One by one lights were lit in the village, and in the houses outlying. But Dagner remained. Was oblivious to happenings in the field of time and space. Not until the stars had been for some time shining did he awake from the mood of intense cerebration into which the words of Mrs. Corbin had cast him. He returned down the mountain and back to his lodgings — Dagner was unmarried — in the house of Frank Straub, the barber.



CHAPTER II

I WAS the exposure of the doings of the "Harum-Scarum Club," a semi-secret organization of boys, that startled the town to searching, serious thinking. It seems that some Hillport boys had formed a club that met in an abandoned boathouse. They got to gambling and drinking, with other things hinted of. Their doings might not have come to light had it not been for the burglarizing of the railroad depot one night. It was traced to one of the members of the club. He confessed. Explained that gambling debts had nagged him to it. Told everything.

George Dagner was shocked into instant activity. His talk with Mrs. Corbin on The Cliff some time before had started a ferment in his brain. Now the process climaxed with dramatic suddenness. He made the discovery that a gone-to-seed village life works its frightfulest desolation not in the material realm but in the moral realm. Because it means the let-down of all of the forces that keep humankind up to standard.

He got out a letter, which he mailed to every member of the commuter colony. It read like this:

For heaven's sake let's do something. Hillport is dead. There's the fact. We must look it in the face. Local industries are passing. Our brightest young people are drifting to the city to swell the undigested hordes there. We have no community life, nothing of wholesome sociability. The town is in a bad way. Not that Hillport is worse than other places; but the moral needs of our cities have absorbed people's thought and energies, with the result that a country problem has grown up right in front of our faces. I am making this appeal to you, because the suburbanite is a new species. He is neither of the country nor of the city, but an amphibious creature living in both elements. Therefore he is particularly fitted to be the connecting link between the city's redundant energies and America's depleted rural life. At present he is largely a

"man without a country." For he is no longer interested in city affairs, neither has he as yet entered democratically into village responsibilities. I ask you to come to a Rally Day at the church next Sunday morning at 11. It is the call of the rural problem to those who have heeded the call to rural life.

Scientists of the scalpel tell us that a nerve current proceeds on its way by means of a series of explosions; the power at first is weak; but at the first ganglion it explodes a nerve-charge there stored up, which relays it on to the next ganglion, where a new burst is occasioned; and thus the current proceeds. So it seems to be with some things in the social realm. Once started, they have a quality of creating a burst in the human units which it encounters, and so is relayed on its way. At least that is what happened on the present occasion. This letter of Dagner's was in itself a trifling affair, and would have been spent of its force quickly. But when it reached Mrs. John Corbin it created one of these explosions. It stirred her joyously. "I don't know when I have before been moved so intimately," said she to her husband, on his return from the city the evening of the day she received it. And she went everywhere among the summer folk, relaying and augmenting the stimulus.

At one of the houses she visited, the daughter, Miss Janet Blake, was out and she was entertained by the father, Galusha Blake — if “entertained” is the word. For “Old Man Blake,” as he was called, was a soured and crotchety individual. It was the sickness of his wife that had brought him to Hillport; one of the earliest in fact of all the commuter colony. To save her he had tried every device. But the change to country life had come too late. She died. And with her, something of Galusha Blake seemed to die also. Certain cords within him snapped. He lost his faith — and consequently his health. He sold out his extensive business interests in the city. Withdrew from all contact with life. And now rheumatism and crutches had completed the job. Mrs. Corbin mentioned to him the low standard of community life in Hillport and asked if something couldn’t be done to quicken the town generally.

“Quicken that vegetative mass of humans!” exclaimed Blake with a sneer. “Dump them into the river — in some spot where the water is deep, you understand, so as not to obstruct navigation. And then populate the village with a new breed. That’s the only way to quicken Hillport.”

“But, Mr. Blake, I’m in earnest.”

“So am I. Look at that wart on the face of

nature," and he pointed out of the window to the village that was in full view. "If that isn't the ugliest huddle of houses ever devised for human habitation! The town went to sleep back in Colonial days and forgot to wake up. They are degenerative Dutchmen, nothing else. For the real back number variety of never-moves, the Hillport native takes precedence over all comers."

"Yes, it is a blotch on a fair landscape," admitted Mrs. Corbin. "But we must vitalize the community."

"Vitalize! Now lookee here, Mrs. Corbin! I moved out here long before the rest of you, and I'm familiar with the facts. If you knew Jim Borst and his cronies, that set of louts which assemble in Welly Bassler's store every night to discuss the affairs of the universe — which means Hillport — you'd know that you couldn't cram a new idea down their gullets with a pneumatic riveter."

"But we wouldn't try to cram new ideas down their — their throats. I felt that some way might be devised whereby we could all work together."

Galusha Blake burst into a laugh of derision. "Work together! You could no more get those clod-hoppers and the summer colony in team harness together than you could yoke up a pea-

cock and a porcupine. The natives don't believe anything good of us; think we're always trying to best them; suspect every move we make. They're in a league against us. Don't they have two prices for everything they sell? They gouge us at every turn. Why, do you know, I sometimes think they send their brats and chickens into the road in the way of our automobiles on purpose, in order to get damage claims on us.

"I tell you, I'm suspicious of them," he continued, warming up. "Don't they assess us three times as much in proportion as their own property? They're vicious blood-suckers, the whole tribe of them. Talk about corrupt politics in the cities! That road commissioner, Pete Mattice, and the gang of heelers he employs on the highways at public expense, have got Tammany Hall beat a mile. No, it's a beautiful dream of yours; but it won't work. Team play between this city colony and the Hillport natives! You might as well try to make Vleetskill Creek run up hill. They and we are critters of different breeds, and won't hitch."

"But the church," put in Mrs. Corbin. "Both classes have need of the unmaterial supplies that come from that source. It is the one common meeting-ground for us adults, and therefore might be made the basis of a new rapprochement."

"The church!" growled Blake. "Do you think you can revamp that institution and make it of use once more in the world? Why, the church is merely a storehouse of antiquities. Not that I'm saying anything against the minister they've got down there. That young man Dagner seems a very decent chap. But he's tied up to an archæological museum and it will be the finish of him."

"It is evident that Galusha Blake is not promising material for a Committee to Further Rural Felicity," said she with a laugh.

"Rural felicity! Believe me, out this way there isn't such a thing any more. Simple life! Communion with nature! All the rest of those poetics! Let the simple-lifers pay a visit here to Hillport, and they'll see that the natives care for never a thing but to make show, put on lugs, ape our ways. Why, the slums of New York City couldn't show some of the low-down immoralities that are the daily doings of a petered-out village like this one. Pastoral beatitude, indeed! Aren't we in everlasting danger of colics and typhoid from the slop holes in their backyards? Fences are down; roads are washed out by the rain; not a gate in the village but needs repair. The vandals, they have slaughtered the trees, and by allowing the winds to sweep through have put an edge to the climate it never had before. "The old

mill-pond, now that the dam is out, is little more than a mud-hole. You can hardly see the depot for the weeds, even if you wanted to get a sight of that tumble-down shack. I tell you, the rural districts in this country are hell-bent; and I guess the sooner they get there the better."

He took breath, preparing to continue; to deliver a dissertation on the badnesses of Hillport was highly to Galusha Blake's taste; indeed, one of the most enjoyable of his diversions. But Mrs. Corbin had visits to pay. She made her escape.

The next Sunday morning saw an uncommon congregation at the Hillport church. Mrs. Corbin's visiting had brought the people out. Had even won Janet Blake to attend.

"I can't go and take part in that church," Miss Janet had said, when Mrs. Corbin first approached her. "Of course, daddy's distorted view of things isn't mine. None the less, I sympathize with him in his attitude toward the uselessness of the church. Mr. Dagner called once. It was only once. For — yes, I'll confess it — I laughed at him. I couldn't work in their Sunday-school and prayer meetings with their "Brother this" and "Sister that."

"But, Janet, this looks like a new move on Mr. Dagner's part. Let's go and see." And Janet permitted herself to be persuaded.

Mr. Dagner took as his text this sentence from the report of the U. S. Country Life Commission: "The time has arrived when the Church must take a larger leadership, both as an institution and through its pastors, in the social reorganization of rural life." He confessed that events in the past few weeks had worked a conversion within him. The primary work of the Church, said he, is not to save individuals here and there, but to lift the community as a whole. Society has become individualized until it has granulated into particles. To breed a coöperative spirit — that is what religion is for; to minister to the community through every channel — its industries, recreation, home, schools, civics.

He showed that the Church once was all of these things, through her religious orders. She first taught scientific farming. She was the sole fount of education. When Europe was a waste, the Church was the model gardener. She was the nursing patron of architecture and painting. She gave the people their shows and pageantry. When other workshops were unknown, she fostered industries. Now all of these departments of life have graduated from her tutelage into independency. But the Church is still needed as their guardian mother; for unless she, as alma mater, pours her spirit into them — her note of

uplook and aspiration — they cannot continue in safety. Why is the mortality rate in village improvement societies so high? he asked. Is it not because this movement has not as yet been related to the Divine? Therefore these energies have been spasmodic and helter-skelter. Community life in America needs a new inspiration, and that inspiration can come only from sources that are essentially religious. The Church must be a fount and focus of community idealism.

“Individualism!” said he. “Have you ever thought how impossible it would be to dissect out an individual from the social tissue in which he is enmeshed? Blade is not keen enough to follow the imaginary line where the individual begins and the social leaves off. A community is a network of interthreading relations, and no person in it is anything of and by himself. He is but a point of force, a ganglion, an intercrossing of nerves from a hundred other human ganglia; hack him loose from these others, he would bleed to death. You can’t save one man unless you save every other man in the town. Our theological teachers were wrong. Social psychology has demonstrated it. You cannot isolate individuals from the community tissue and dispatch them to the skies in private packages. We are like Alpine climbers — tied together with a rope; and the

highest man can go no faster than those who are below.

"To be sure, there is a sense in which each of us is an originating and responsible entity. But that side has by now received ample and more than ample stress. Our religion has worked overtime to emphasize the individual, until society is now a cloud dust of mutually repellent atoms. Mass action — the only kind of action that achieves large achievements — has become impossible. And the viciousness of it is nowhere more seen than in our country districts, where isolation is itself the constant problem and hindrance. To fuse country people into unison, mass them for community action, is the crying task of our time; and a task sufficiently recalcitrant without religion to enter in and harden the people into self-saving egoistic units. What is keeping Hillport back is this: our unwillingness or inability to blend, to mix, to pool our paltry private energies into a flying wedge that would make head against the obstacles that confront us. We need a community pride, a community sense, a community conscience, a community will."

Thereupon he told how the boys in Hillport had got into bad ways. He handled the thing without gloves; but he laid the blame upon the community. Recreation, said he, is the right of

every human being, and when life gets to be as dull and tepid as it has in this neighbourhood, you can hardly blame a boy for getting his excitement in any way he can. And the Church most of all is to blame, because we are supposed to be doing for this our age what our Master did for his time. And what was that? Why, He sought to fill life so full of legitimate interest that illegitimate desires would find no room in which to grow. That Apollo-Christ preached the gospel of the body as well as of the soul. He was the child of laughter-loving Galilee, which lay midway between the light-hearted pagan world and stern old Judea. Why so afraid of Greece and her pagan love of the body and of all things glad and beauteous? May not that be precisely the needed complement to round our christianity into completeness? A writer has sounded an alarm over what he terms the impending paganism of our country districts. But he mischoses his terms. The peril that threatens is not paganism, with its richnesses of literature and art and intellectual pursuit; but heathenism, that dull stupor of communities which live a drab and routinary existence. If one half of the effort this church has made to eradicate the weeds from the lives of the people had gone to planting beauty, zestful employment, and normal sociability in this community, a thrifty growth of

the graces would of themselves have choked the weeds.

"It all comes to this," said he in closing: "We can't have a live church in a dead town. Either this church will have power to resurrect Hillport from its present sleep of death, or Hillport will die, and will drag this church down with it into the selfsame grave. I have assembled you here this morning to vote whether it shall be life or death. Will you volunteer for a neighbourhood work?"

A pause followed; a silence almost audible in the electric quality of it. Hal Cushman, member of the commuter colony, junior partner of the law firm of Fleetwood & Cushman in the city, looked around uneasily. He had never been to church in Hillport before, and had consented on this morning in question because Mrs. Corbin had got his wife to go, who accordingly needed some one to accompany her. In his turnings he met the eyes of Mrs. Corbin. A something looked forth from her face, a something of entreaty, of wistfulness. Cushman stirred in his seat still more uneasily. Then he arose.

From the point of view of oratory, Hal Cushman's speech that morning was the dimest failure ever recorded against him. He spoke with stammerings, hesitation, repeatings. Couldn't seem to find himself. In fact, he said so himself:

"I'm a fish out of water. I never spoke inside of church walls before in my life. And if I survive the present occasion, I don't know as I shall ever attempt it again. Fact is, pews don't seem to have been made to speak from. But the present is an extraordinary occasion. And in keeping therewith, a most extraordinary compulsion seems to be upon me. I've long been an ardent advocate of Hillport's ozone, to my city-tired friends. And if now it's a case of life or death for this town, I wish for one to record my vote on the side of life for her, and not of death for her."

Thereupon he hesitated a moment, then continued:

"We lawyers have considerable experience in the difficult art of getting people together. And it has been my discovery that the best way to start things with the fewest possible mistakes is for a few who are interested to meet together first and sort of talk things over. Now if a place should be needed for a conference of those who have this matter at heart, why, our house" — he looked at his wife, and received encouragement to go ahead — "is at your disposal freely."

That broke the ice. Other speeches followed. The offer that had been made them was accepted. And the following Thursday night was appointed. Thursday night saw a handful of people at the

Cushman home, most of them commuters, with Doctor Rivenburg, the village physician, and a few others. A community organization was decided upon, open to everybody. "Not to work for, but to work with," was the way Mr. Corbin expressed the spirit that should characterize their doings. In conformity therewith, it was decided that the society should be founded on a basis of sheer democracy, dues one dollar a year, so that everybody could join.

"Of course," remarked Mr. Corbin, "gifts to the treasury from any of the more wealthy members will not be prohibited by the constitution."

It was decided to canvass the entire town and get the people out to the next meeting. Thereupon a question arose: Should the Italians be invited? Back from the railroad was a settlement of them known as "Shantytown," and they had long been a source of dread to the Hillport people.

O'Flaherty, the village teamster and expressman, was never tired of bemoaning their presence in the town: "Sure, they're a damage to the landscape, the dirty Dagos! We ought to admit nary another one of thim forinners into this counthry, to take jobs away from white folks. What with the Sheenies and them Eyetalians crowding in, it's getting so any more that we christians don't count for a damn."

But these swarthy folk from the Po and the Tiber were needed, it seems, for construction work in the neighbourhood. Therefore they could not be got rid of. But what to do with them as an ingredient in Hillport's melting pot?

Most of those at the Cushman meeting were in favour of leaving them out, not through any personal snobbishness, but lest the association be wrecked at the start by an ultra democracy, beautiful enough in theory but impossible in the work-out. Mrs. Cushman, however, pleaded for them. There was no country, she said, that she enjoyed visiting more than Italy, where the sunshine seems to have gotten under the skin of its people. Doctor Rivenburg said he knew a man in Shantytown, a Tony Rebito, who spoke English and was something of a leader among them. He also owned some property over there; at least a shanty or two. Tony would probably not accept; but they could extend him an invitation and thus keep to their spirit of fundamental democracy.

Rivenburg was delegated to extend an invitation to Tony to be present and represent Shantytown in the counsels of the association. Thereupon the meeting adjourned to reassemble the following Thursday night in the same place.

News that a neighbourhood association had actually been launched got swiftly noised. And

it created no small stir. It was hardly two days later when Mrs. Corbin had a visit from Janet Blake.

"Mrs. Corbin, I've come to see if the Neighbourhood Association would take as a member a person like me. Because ——"

But Mrs. Corbin had rushed to her, and was clasping her in two hearty arms. Barbara Corbin always was impulsive; but somehow usually had the good fortune to steer her unpremeditated energies into the fitting channel.

"Janet, you're a dear!" she exclaimed. "Why, do you know you've saved me a trip to your house. Because I was appointed a committee of one on your case — to visit Miss Janet Blake, acquaint her with the purposes of our organization, and bring her, will-she nill-she, to our next meeting."

"Oh, you'll find me an utter no-account. But the truth is, I'm ashamed to be doing nothing. Mrs. Corbin, I'm an idler. A mere incumbrance on the face of the earth. I'm a consumer, without being equally a producer. Oh, the indecency of it! I just can't stand it any longer; so there! Indeed, I've been in heart's sorrow over it for longer than you'd believe. But until Mr. Dagner got the church on to this new tack, I didn't see anything that could be done.'

Once more the elder woman clasped arms about her:

"You're one of us, Janet. You're one of us. And I love you just bushels and bushels."

And Janet left, pledged to be on hand at the next meeting.

"I've news for you," rejoiced Mrs. Corbin to her husband when he came home from the city that night. "Janet Blake is coming into the Neighbourhood Association."

"Bully!" said he. "Barbara, I believe you could win a Hottentot to quadratic equations. Why, Janet Blake is one of the last I'd have looked for. That society bird going to take an interest in community affairs!"

"But hadn't you noticed how bored she's looked for a long time back? The Country Club, with its everlasting masques and dress parades — dances and luncheons, luncheons and dances — Janet Blake is too intelligent to relish that as life's sole aim and end. There are deeps in that girl. I've known it all along. And the Spirit of Democracy is calling her."

"You see good in everybody. I confess, girl, it's a clairvoyance I never attained to."

But though the Neighbourhood Idea thus found welcome with some like Miss Blake, it made no hit at all with the set that had its headquarters

nightly in Bassler's store. Bill Van Wormer, who from his customary seat on the counter by the coffee grinder exercised a something of leadership over the conversation around the stove, found this new event a prolific theme.

"I see the dominie is startin' a new kind of a revival," said he, a night or two after the preliminary meeting at Cushman's.

"A revival?" exclaimed Paul Mattice. "Capt. Paul" was the title by which he referred to himself and was generally known; for he had married the widow of a sea captain, and had taken the title. "But this ain't the time of year for one. Who ever heard tell of gettin' up a revival at this season. Leastwise, it ain't usually ——"

"But this is a new kind, I tell you," said Van Wormer, taking his pipe from his mouth because of the importance of the theme. "It is called a revival, but it hain't got nothin' to do with religion. It's ——"

"Yes, it has, too," put in Billy Beekman, from the other side of the stove, where he was seated on the bread hamper in which baker loaves were shipped into Hillport twice weekly from the city. "My woman come home from meeting last Sunday morning, and she says the dominie calls it real religion — the practical kind."

"Well, the dominie can call it what he likes,"

insisted Van Wormer, "but I guess I know religion when I see it. And this here thing hain't got anything more to do with religion than a Dago has with sauerkraut. It isn't to save souls at all. It's just merely to improve the community — Village Vital — Vitali — Village Vitalization — that's what it's goin' to be. Leastwise, that's what they say."

"Yes," put in Pete Mattice, the road commissioner, and who as political boss of the town hung around the general store of an evening to keep "the boys" in line; "yes, it's some of this uplift business that you read about in the papers. Those kid glove people in the city colony are establishin' a mission to save us from our backward ways and get some culture down our windpipes. It seems our town isn't go-ahead enough for the likes of them. Haven't they been kickin' about the condition of the roads since 'way back? Quarrelling with me because I hain't put in a new bridge yet up at Hank Scrom's, where the old one was carried away. But I can't ask my men to work in wet weather like this; like to see me! Those cityites say I hire men for my road force just because they vote the ticket. Well, who wouldn't. Guess I got to take care of the boys. Pete Mattice looks out for his friendsev'ry time, and you can bank on it. Them as sticks by me, I sticks by

them. Hillport was here long before them city swells came. And I guess will be here after they're dead and gone; that much do they count. Now if they're so all-fired fidgetty to do some up-liftin' ——"

"No, you ain't got it nowheres right," put in Jim Borst from his seat on the cracker barrel. "As I heard tell of it, they're not plannin' no lift-up business for us, nor we for them. It's to be a work-together affair; a mu—a mutuality; yes, that's it; I overhear the dominie say so to some onedown to the corner last night as I was a-passin'. Mutuality; that means, all pullin' on the rope to once."

"Thank you, Jim, we didn't know what it meant," remarked Pete in his cuttingest tones; for he was nettled to note any apparent defection from his ranks, in the direction of the city colony. "Most likely you'd like to mix in with them patent-leather folks. Wouldn't it make a pretty team—like hitching up a jackass and a nanny goat."

"All I can say is this," said Van Wormer from his throne on the counter: "If this new shebang tries to mix up the city folks and the villagers all in one mess, it'll tangle things worse than a dish of spaghetti." And he replaced his pipe to its customary place on the left side of his face,

with the satisfaction of having spoken the finishing word.

With this mood abroad in Hillport, it can be seen that the few villagers who went to Hal Cushman's house the following Thursday night were courageous in a high degree. They were for the most part girls, with some mothers, and a man or two; among them Frank Straub, who had closed his barber shop to attend.

Strange to relate, Shantytown was represented. Tony Rebito had accepted Doctor Rivenburg's invitation, and now had accompanied him to the meeting. The doctor was of two minds whether to be grieved or happy over this guest who companioned him; he felt like one who had brought a bear to a dinner party, and is in mortal fear as to how it is going to demean itself.

Dagner had tried to get the villagers present in force. But had to announce the fruitlessness of his attempt:

"When I told them that the meeting was to be here at the house of Mr. Cushman, it scared them into dumbness."

"Me no scare," put in Tony with animation. "Me come quick. Me like peoples. Shantytown lonesome. No peoples. No like to be lonesome. No used to it, in Italia. My old man there, he has big farm; lots people. Mayor

of the town he come visit my old man; he stay to dinner sometime. My dad, big man there. But no room for Tony; plenty brothers. I take ship. Come to 'Merica. And work, work. But nobody here say, 'Hello, Tony!' Lonesome in Shantytown."

"Good for Doctor Rivenburg to have brought you!" exclaimed Mrs. Corbin. "Why, Mr. Rebato, had it not been for him, we wouldn't have known you existed. That's how far apart people can be; and living in the same township together."

The doctor visibly brightened; breathed more easily each moment, as he saw how reposefully at home Tony seemed to be in the company, and with what unconscious grace he fitted into the environment. Tony had on a blue shirt, a red kerchief at the collar — with his curly black hair and bronzed face and throat, by no means an unpleasing tog-out. Indeed Miss Blake whispered to Dagner and said that a painter would probably choose Tony out of the whole company as the only one lending himself to purposes of art.

They formally organized themselves into the "Hillport Neighbourhood Association," with Cushman president. "We'll make it more than a focus of leadership," said Mrs. Corbin. "It will be the building of a new Hillport within the shell of the old." A simplest form of organiza-

tion was devised. Frank Straub, the treasurer, collected dues then and there. And the thing was launched.

In laying out the work, no difficulty was experienced in finding a place for all. In fact, when the members of the association were divided up into the different departments of community life needing attention, it was found that the workers were too few to go around. It was proposed, therefore, that the organization confine itself for the next few weeks to the task of getting new members. But Corbin pleaded for another course.

"The best way to secure new members," said he, "is for the association to get busy and do things. When the people see that we are at grips with Hillport's real needs, they'll take notice; and some of them will buckle-to and help. We won't need to drag them in with a neck-halter. They'll come of their own accord. Activity brings publicity, every time."

"Wisest words I ever listened to," commented Cushman. And the rest so voted also. Therefore it was decided to take hold of some definite work straightway.

A library for the people was advocated by Dagner, and was so strongly seconded by Mrs. Cushman and two or three others that it was finally adopted as the thing with which to make a

start. An active institution for the circulation of literature through the community would be a channel for all of the other doings that might be proposed later.

Miss Blake was mentioned by Mrs. Corbin to be the chairman of this department.

"Janet, your father wouldn't object, would he?"

"Oh, as to that, I guess the way would be clear enough," answered Janet with a laugh. "You see, daddy doesn't take this neighbourhood project at all seriously. He says it's just a faddism on our part and that if it will amuse me for a little while, he's willing. He said this evening as I was leaving the house: 'Won't do you a bit of harm, as I can see; and will probably be cheaper for me than saddle horses, to keep you amused for a spell.'"

A general laugh went round at the well-known cynicism of Galusha Blake.

"No," continued Janet, "there wouldn't be any family objections. But I'm not sure you'd want me as head of this department, if you knew my ideas about it. Because I don't see much good in opening a library in a neighbourhood such as this, and then wait for the people to come to it. They wouldn't come. It's been tried. Tuxedo attempted it — a fine great building, all of modern appointments; and the villagers afraid of it.

Now if you were foolish enough to put me in charge of the library department, I'd not be content until it had a horse-and-cart to travel up and down these roads day by day, carrying the goods to the people. You see what a non-conformist I am; and the nuisance I'd be."

Barbara Corbin rushed over to Janet and grasped her hand.

"Janet Blake, you're the brightest, splendidest person of us all. That library on wheels is the very thing."

"Gooda, gooda!" exclaimed Tony, catching the contagion from Mrs. Corbin's exuberant enthusiasm and naturalness — children of nature, both of them. "Bringa the book to Shantytown; pictures in it. Teacha to read Anglish. My people in Shantytown no come for the book; but, glada to get it when it come to them. Gooda, gooda!" and he clapped his hands in glee.

The infection spread to the others. They became loud in their acclaim of Janet Blake's "library on wheels" idea. Voted straightway to give her freest hand in carrying out her plans.

"But you don't estimate sufficiently the obstacle in the way," said she. "The thing I have in mind would cost so much that ——"

"Which leads to a thought that has been incubating in the back of my brain for some days," put

in Mrs. Corbin. "Namely, our need of funds, a working capital. And I believe I know a way. What would you say to a fair? It would bring us all together. There must be salable articles to be found somewhere, and it would give our treasury a start."

"I help, I help," said Tony, starting up. "I bring Italia music. We sing at the fair. Draw lots people to hear. And we dance, too. Oh, we know." And leaping to his feet, he sang a strain of a folklore song of his people — the unstudied gladness of some swain made happy by requited love. The rich tenor notes, the spontaneity, the unconstrained posings, the verve, made the impromptu quite resistless. He was greeted with an outburst of applause as unforced as the dash of his own performance; and it continued, without need of acceleration by a claque. The company caught the spirit of the thing; entered into the enthusiasm with gusto. The meeting with one voice voted to hold a fair in benefit of a library fund for the town of Hillport.



CHAPTER III



Corbins offered the use of their home for the library fund fair; and the offer was accepted. "The Rocks," as their home was called, was far from an ideal place for such an event; house was not large enough. But there was no hall in the town. Because of the season the event had to be held indoors. Therefore the Hillport Neighbourhood Association, true to its policy, made a beginning under the best conditions that offered.

Barbara Corbin was an unusual woman. "The uncommonest creature I ever met," was the verdict expressed by Doctor Rivenburg. "An

exceptional soul," was Dagner's way of putting it. "Positively the most contagious woman ever I knew," was another variant on the theme, supplied by Hal Cushman.

But of them all, the most enthusiastic admirer was her husband, "My better three quarters," was John Corbin's usual designation of her. And he meant it. He remarked to Dagner once with deep seriousness that although the sermons didn't interest him a hill of beans, still he felt the need of church attendance in his own case to preserve him from the sin of idolatry. It was nigh comical to see the change in his demeanour at business and in his home. In his office in the city he was easily a master of men. But at home, an almost servile deference to this "wonder-woman," as he sometimes — and half in earnest — designated her.

Probably the secret of the spell she cast lay in her naturalness; true, a worn and cheapened word. But in her case expressive of something real and mystic, a deep interior union with the heart of things. There was a spontaneity, an unconstrained exuberance about her, like that of birds and other untamed creatures happily unspoiled by civilization. She had a way of doing unconventional things in so straightforward and unself-conscious fashion that they took on a fitness all their own. There for instance was that visit

to Old Man Blake's. By another than she, the neighbourhood would have been immeasurably surprised, so known was he for recluseness and uncompanionability. But after her visit, people began to wonder why they themselves had not been more neighbourly to him. The proprieties? To her they were simply out of focus. Therefore the impossible melted from before her; became plastic.

She was *natura naturans*. Some said this was because of the fund of wild-lore that she had acquired. But more likely it was the other way round. She knew nature intellectually, because she herself was so close to its pulsating heart; indeed an almost arterial connection, so tender was the intimacy wherewith she entered into its will and purpose. Between her and the furry-and-feathered folk there was a first-cousinship. She knew them without book knowledge.

That was why the call of the country had brought the Corbins from their city home. At first vacationing in Hillport, the infection of the place gained upon them. Soon they found themselves spending their week-ends there even through the winter. Until finally they altered the heating plant in their country house and made "The Rocks" into their year-round abode.

Thus her strange, subtle kinship with nature —

her Alma Parens — revealed itself in the house they had built at "The Rocks." It was unlike anything else that had been seen or heard of in all that region. Not that she had strived after novelty of effect. Simply she built the house out of her interior promptings. Therefore it represented her very mould and texture, as truly as the house a crustacean grows around itself for its abode. It was of the English cottage style; yet finely adapted to American conditions and by no means naked of the ingenuities of our resourceful and inventive modernity. Some of which inventiveness she herself contributed. The fire-resisting roof, for one thing. People said that thatch for a dwelling house to-day was superannuated — too combustible. But she up and devised a weaving of asbestos strands for the top coating, and it took with the insurance companies without a murmur. So the building stood, homeful, and with a grace all its own.

Because natural to herself, the house fitted into the nature-setting that encompassed it. It was the universal remark of all who saw it that the Corbin house seemed to have grown up out of the earth, so at one was it with the plot upon which it stood and the scene which framed it in. Vines overran it. Shrubbery cuddled up affectionately, as though making a nest for some creature of their

own wild kingdom. And every rock lent to the structure either a buttressing arm or some harmonizing line to eke out the building's long flat contour of stone. The birds also had learned that on these premises they were safe. Indeed, the mistress of the place had invited these wildings by erecting bird-nestings here and there and planting a mountain ash for their food. Both with this home at "The Rocks," and the woman who there presided, you had the feel of being in the presence of some object of nature — that same something of poise, repose, massive self-acceptance; no trace of the poseur. This was the home that had been opened to the association for its first neighbourhood event.

One morning, in preparation for the fair, Mrs. Corbin and Janet Blake went in the former's motor car on a tour through the village and outskirts. They were seen to stop at house after house, leave the car and go inside for a time; and sometimes even paid visits to the barn at the rear. It was noticed that the houses they stopped at were the old ones of the community, or where the family itself was known to be of the village's more ancient stock. The two women themselves were not garrulously communicative as to their errand; and the people they visited were at a pause to explain the nature of it comprehensively.

A day or two later a wagon drove up in front of many of the homes thus visited and gathered up from them several loads of furniture; if it could be called furniture, the array of dilapidation which was bundled into the vehicle and drawn away to the shop of Henry Snyder, the village wheelwright. The mystification was widespread; and excitedly did the tongues of the town wag in conclave upon it.

Van Wormer, from his throne on Welly Bassler's counter, took up the theme with gusto that night, to his colleagues in the "Cracker-Barrel Council," as Galusha Blake once upon a time had irreverently styled them.

"Did that 'air committee to stock a lunatic asylum call at your house?" he asked Billy Beekman, who had just come in and who, finding his seat on the bread hamper preëmpted by Joe Van Dike, had brought out a soap box, turned it on end in front of the stove, and seated himself thereon.

Billy shook his head, asked Van Wormer what tarnation thing he was alluding to.

"Why," continued Van Wormer, "they come to my house — a pair of 'em. I wasn't home, but my woman was. They said they were looking for anteeks — that's what they called the thing they were after. Sally said we didn't have any; in fact, never had 'em in the house, that she knew

of; didn't care for 'em. They said — one of 'em was a middle-aged woman, and t'other was youngish sort, Sally says — they answered back and said it was too bad we didn't have no old furniture around, because they were willing to pay cash money for any articles of that species that took their fancy. Sally said, if it was old furniture they was after, she could accommodate 'em fine as anything, because the garret was stuffed full. But it wa'n't worth nothin'; just old things that had been stuck away because broken and wore out. All the same, they wanted to see it. So Sally took 'em upstairs. And what do you think? That woman of mine got six dollars out of them for an old brass-bound chest that I'd have give away to any tramp who'd have asked for it, so out of kilter was it and banged up. You can know how old it was when I tell you that it come over with the first Van Wormers when they landed in this country from Holland, longer time ago than anybody heard tell of. The brass was that green with age you couldn't tell it from scrap iron. Oh, that woman of mine has got a business head on her shoulders all right. I told her so when I got home and heard the story." And Van Wormer resumed his pipe, chuckling with expansive joy.

Beekman, his understanding illumined, retracted.

his negation. They had paid a visit at his house also, he announced. And he brought his soap box nearer the centre of the group, opened the stove door to spit, closed it again, and gazed round upon the company with a knowing look which always betokened with him a story coming.

"Well, let's have it, Billy," said Jim Borst from his seat on the cracker barrel.

"Why," and Billy spit again, properly to solemnize the thing by prolonging the pause — "they come to my house. But they didn't find no brass-bound chests in my garret." And he chuckled to himself with infinite relish. They waited while the cachination rolled through his voluminous person. Then he continued:

"All they found at my house was some chairs, and sich like. I was to home when they come. And lucky it wuz, too; for my woman ain't got a business head like Bill's there, if I do have to say it myself. Well, they asks for wornout furniture — they didn't call 'em anteeks, in my house; just plain furniture was what they wanted, says they. 'I'm your man,' says I; 'I've got heaps of it.' And I took 'em to the setting-room and showed 'em what was there. 'Oh, no,' says they; 'we mean, wornout furniture, the kind that was packed away years and years ago.' 'Oh,' says I, 'I've got that 'air kind, too. But it's all up under

the gable roof, in the cobwebs; and so plain you wouldn't probably care a snap for it.' 'We'll take a look, if you don't mind, Mr. Beekman.' 'All right,' says I; 'no trouble to show goods.' And I took 'em up. And they liked the chairs right on the start. 'Shippen — Shippendales,' that's what they called 'em. I let 'em go on talkin'. I called 'em chairs. But if they wanted to call 'em Shippendales, or shoe boxes, I wasn't goin' to contradict 'em. Said they: 'Are you sure you wish to part with these? they're really valuable, you know.' 'They're for sale,' says I, 'pervided I git my price.' 'What price do you set?' said they. 'Five dollars,' says I — just like that; there were seven of the chairs in all. 'Five dollars?' said they; 'isn't that just a trifle high? Because we'll have to lay out considerable more to get them in repair.' 'Five dollars; not a cent less,' says I; 'why, just look, ladies; you're gettin' seven chairs — Shippendales, I should have said — 'nough to furnish a whole room, for five dollars. 'Oh,' said they; 'you mean five dollars for the lot. Suppose we make it a dollar for each, Mr. Beekman.' 'At any figger you say,' says I, kind of puzzled fer a minnit to git head or tail to the thing; but sharp as anything, you can bet. And they up and paid me cash on the spot. I put the money in my pocket, and I said: 'Ladies, I've got some-

thing else you might like to look at. It's a hair-cloth sofy and good as new; becuz it's been kept in the parlour, which nobody don't use. And I'd let it go fairly cheap; if you care to look at it. It's downstairs.' But they didn't seem to take no interest in the sofy; in fact, they both got to lookin' out of the window just then at somethin' or other. And so I didn't push the thing. Think of it! A dollar a piece for chairs that were castoff things back in my granddad's day. Why, there wa'n't a one of them you'd have dast set down on, their legs were that wobbly."

"Leastwise, you couldn't set on one of 'em, could you, Billy, with that barrel of pork amidships?" commented Captain Paul with a wink at the others.

"I tell you, it's a lunytic asylum they're a-start-in'," insisted Van Wormer, refilling his pipe. And not one of the company was prepared to contradict him.

The fair committee members were equally pleased with the transaction. They were in high spirits over their purchase of what to the uninitiated seemed naught but broken junk. And their judgment was rewarded. For when the furniture left Snyder's shop recemented in every joint, and cleaned, it made a very presentable appear-

ance piled away on both sides of the great hall in the Corbin residence.

As the news spread that cash was being paid for ancient furniture, word came into the committee from numerous farmers round about who had articles for sale. And then was discovered what proved a surprise to many — namely, that Hillport was one of the oldest settlements in the State; and that her prime had been back in the pre-Revolution era. Therefore, when the last garret had debouched its contents, and Henry Snyder had displayed his skill in repairs and retouchings, there was assembled an array of genuine Colonial furniture, some of it of the period of Chippendale and Heppelwhite.

Indeed, when the garnering was completed, the Corbins found their hall uncomfortably gorged. So they made space for it by glassing in the roomy porch that breasted one end of the house. This was an improvement they had long been contemplating. The prevailing winds swept from that quarter and in winter made it difficult on some days to heat the house. A glassed porch, therefore, would have been a wind-break of no mean value. But it involved considerable of an outlay. And Mr. Corbin, speaking to Hal Cushman one day, said that he hardly liked to spend so much money. "Not that we haven't

got it to spend," he added; "truth is, Hal, I am frightened over the way my business is growing, at the revenues flowing in. It puts upon Barbara and me a sense of stewardship that we never had before. We find ourselves increasingly disinclined to spend on our own comfort, seeing that the social need is so tremendous round about."

Now, however, that the outlay was called for to make the fair a success, they went ahead with it. And the sun parlour thus created added as it were a new room to the house, extending across the entire end.

The committee was desirous to have a needle-work table, as well as the furniture sale. Not the ordinary "sewed stuff" of aprons, dust-caps *et al.* The idea was to have a table that should contain artcraft products — reproductions of Colonial fabrics, braided rugs, old-time lace, and the like. But what was their surprise on going about it to find that the girls in Hillport couldn't sew. Not only had the industrial energies of the men in the community fallen away, but the womanly arts had been caught in the same decline. No longer known among them was the needle as a handcraft instrument capable of wondrous effects. Even the mothers had lost the vision, and saw in the sewing gift nothing save a ministration to the hard utilities of existence.

"Janet, this is the sorriest sign that has come to me of the village's degeneration," commented Mrs. Corbin with the tremor of a tear in her tones. And both women were depressed.

But there came to them a ray in the midst of the gloom. In response to their repeated inquiries in the village—for they were loath to believe the art utterly a lost one—they were directed to "Auntie Agnes," as every one designated her. This Agnes Lawyer lived alone in a cottage at one end of the village, and could do "fancy sewing," as the neighbours expressed it.

Hieing thither, they found a smallish woman, middle-aged, and with a trim, alert air. She lived quietly, and in retirement. But there was a firelight in her eye telling of energetic supplies of life that had been smothered down—largely because they had found no vent. Long ago she had perceived that she could find in Hillport no companionable acquaintanceship; for she was of an idealist turn. Therefore she had perforce withdrawn herself into the circle of her cottage home, in company with her reading in winter, and her kitchen garden at the rear which she worked in summer; she had developed interior resources to replace the outward dearth.

She received the two visitors with simple, unaffected hospitality. Brought them into the one

room of the house that was heated, and which in winter served as dining and living room combined. And soon all three were chatting in heartiest fashion.

"But how do you manage it?" asked Mrs. Corbin, in admiration of the tidy interior, and the rich but perfect taste which was everywhere in evidence.

"Oh, I have been coerced to the simplified life," she answered; "and do you know I find it not at all a hardship. My garden feeds me nearly the whole year through. And then I take in sewing now and then, when I need money — pot-boilers — hideously commercialized work, I assure you; party dresses for Hillport débutantes, et cetera. No other kind could find a market in the town."

"But isn't there other kinds of sewing that you have done, or could do?" she was asked.

Aunty Agnes hesitated a moment. Then took them into the upstairs room, and opening a chest took out some fabrics she had worked.

"It isn't commercial," she explained; "there's no buyer for it. And I suppose it's foolish of me to spend time at it. But I enjoy a bit of needlework of a winter's afternoon, when I'm tired of reading. You know I don't have many callers to take up the hours. Guess that's the reason

the community calls me Auntie Agnes. I'm something of an oddity, in the estimation of the townspeople. We have never mixed much. Just why, I am unable to explain. It isn't that I don't like my neighbours. For I really do; even if I do not go to their meetings to enjoy tea and gossipings."

"Oh, look, Janet!" exclaimed Mrs. Corbin, and she held up a bedspread worked in the cartwheel figure. "Quite what we were looking for. And wrought with excessive nicety!"

Janet shared the admiration of the elder woman, and together they went through the chest's entire contents.

"Work of that sort, if known, would find gladdest purchasers," was Janet's decided statement as she laid down the last piece.

"They are for sale?" inquired Mrs. Corbin.

"Willingly, for I assure you I am by no means in affluence," said Auntie Agnes. "Though I don't know but perhaps I am rich, too," she added with a quiet smile; "seeing that I have simplified my needs down to a point below my income."

"You're Auntie Agnes to me from this moment," exulted Mrs. Corbin, taking her hand in hearty directness.

And so it was decided that this Colonial needlework, the product of many a lonely winter's day

spent anything but lonesomely, should be sent to Mrs. Corbin's and placed on sale at the fair.

Indeed the preparations for the event proceeded more prosperously than had been anticipated. The entire community began to take notice that something was stirring. The villagers became interested because it was a novel thing to see the city colony engaging in local affairs. And even the butterfly element among the colony folk took hold — it was at the least a pleasing variant from their round — a bit monotonous — of social diversissements. When the date finally rolled around, therefore, and the Corbin home was thrown open, the attendance from the first day was encouraging. And the interest steadily increased.

Aunt Agnes had been induced to preside in person over her table. Both she and the product of her deft and conscientious needle received no small amount of attention. Mrs. Barie Barie, the richest woman of the colony, and who had been induced to visit the fair on this afternoon largely to escape the ennui of a blank day in her social engagement-book, pounced upon the art needlework on this the first afternoon of the fair and bought three quarters of it bodily.

"Just what I've been desiring," she exclaimed with delighted inflection to the group of friends who had accompanied her. "Now I can

furnish my house in Colonial style even to the bedspreads." And though the prices marked had been so high as to astonish the simple woman whose labour had wrought them, none the less Mrs. Barie paid them without murmur, and expressed unforced gratitude that work of this kind was still obtainable.

This gave an éclat to the art needle fabrics. And the supply was soon sold out. Thereupon Aunty Agnes refused to accept as her share of the proceeds a cent more than the bare materials had cost her.

"But you need to live," insisted Mrs. Corbin. "You have to work to live."

"No, believe it of me," answered the prim little artist-craftsman. "Why, when I am suffered to work at what I like, I have the joy of creation — and live to work."

"Well," put in Janet Blake, "the committee is exceedingly grateful to you; not alone for the money your gift has added to the treasury, but for the contribution which your skilled craftsmanship has made to the interest of the fair." And she drew Mrs. Corbin to one side, where they conversed together for some time in low tones, looking over occasionally to Aunty Agnes presiding at her table all unconscious.

The fair lasted four days; and the crowds kept

up undiminished. The evening attendance was especially encouraging. This was in no small degree due to Tony Rebuto and his troupe, who gave their folk-dances each night. Tony had by no means been trifling when he had offered to help with the fair. Therefore when Dagner and the doctor had waited upon him one evening at his hut in Shantytown, and told him the committee was expecting him to furnish part of the entertainment programme, he set to in earnest. Picking out a half dozen of his dark-skinned countrymen, those who were most talented in voice and grace of gesture, he rounded them up each evening when their work was done, in an empty freight car that stood on a siding. There they practised some of their national dances and ballads.

"It go to buy a buggy of books," Tony explained to them. And they worked with a will. Therefore, when the time for the fair came round, Tony had a troupe of entertainers who combined native talent and zealous rehearsal.

"Who'd have believed it!" was Mrs. Barie Barie's exclamation to those who were next to her the first night of the fair, as Tony and his compatriots were dancing one of their native tarentellas. "I never dreamed we had talent like this right within our community limits.

Why, it's grand opera, with the only difference that this is real, whereas the kind you see over the footlights is imitation. Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Dagner, that all this natural fund of joy and beauty and melody and grace of the Land of the Lemon Tree has been concealed down here in Shantytown all these months, and we didn't know it?"

Dagner replied that it was a discovery, indeed a revelation, to all of them.

Nora O'Flaherty, daughter of Martin O'Flaherty the expressman, was also outspoken in her expressions of approval. She was a red-cheeked lassie fast blossoming into womanhood. She played the organ in Dagner's church, was a girl of parts, and the pride of her daddy.

"It was just a shame of dad not to come to this fair," she exclaimed, voicing her indignation to some of the people around her. "I told him he ought to, for business reasons if nothing more. Because all of these are his customers. And do you know, he was halfway persuaded. He gave the use of his wagon between train-times, to cart stuff for this fair. And was really planning to come, at least for one night. But he heard that Mr. Rebito and some other of the Italians were on the programme. And then he changed his mind. Said he wouldn't go near the place. I don't see

why he should be so down on them. They're just as good as he is, even though they are poor. And I've told Mr. Rebuto that, too. I went right up to him to-night and said so; after that song of his." And her eyes sparkled with the courageous spirit that was in her.

The event of the fair that climaxed it all was the auctioning of the furniture the last day. Hal Cushman had been impressed into service as auctioneer, and he turned his experience as public speaker splendidly to account. In a speech of introduction he told the people how appropriate it was that the furniture had been found in this community itself, because the Neighbourhood Association had been founded to be an indigenous thing, of Hillport and for Hillport—to get the community interested in itself.

"The trouble is," said he, "we residents here have been seeking beauty of scenery and picturesqueness at the ends of the earth. Whereas it was our job as human beings to look for it and to develop it in the landscape and the living people at our door." And to illustrate the wealth of human interest overlooked by this mad rushing to the antipodes for diversion, he told of some of the thrilling features in Hillport's history; the rich background of Indian lore in that locality; the Hillport of Colonial times; and the scenes of

the Revolution that had had their setting within or neighbouring her borders.

"We wish to conserve these riches of historic inheritance," said he, "and capitalize them for purposes of village pride and community consciousness. Therefore we are giving you a chance to-night to buy these articles of furniture which garnished the life of this community a hundred years and more ago. To what end? Well, first to the end that your houses may be artistic, with an interior furnishing than which none could be more suitable and fitting. And secondly, to the end that these keepsakes and heirlooms of Hillport's ancient day may not be lost or sold abroad and so scattered beyond hope of recall, but may be preserved right here in the town, as a lasting memorial and reminder of the community's present claim upon us."

His words, delivered with a ring of earnestness, had most telling effect. Not only the attractiveness of the objects in themselves, but now local patriotism had been enlisted. So that the bidding ran high, and purse strings were liberally unloosed. There was a Windslow chair with arms like a closed hand; some rush seated slat-backs dating from 1750; a Dutch heirloom of 1740, and a 200-year-old roundabout of unstained mahogany and incredible weight. Cushman's quips as

auctioneer, sandwiched in with a serious word now and then recalling the people to locality pride, kept the spiritedness high. And four-posters, highboys, sideboards, roundabouts, desks, tables, mirrors, clocks, and chairs went at a lively rate.

A night or two later, Van Wormer remarked to those around the stove at Bassler's store: "I hear say that that 'air furniture we sold went at topnotch figgers at the auction up at Corbin's house the other night. They cleaned up nigh on to a thousand dollars — cash."

"How much d'you say?" asked Billy Beekman, straightening up.

"I said, nigh on to a thousand dollars. And them chairs of your'n, Billy — do you know what they sold at?"

"No, I ain't heard."

"Well, they sold at twenty dollars a piece, all seven of 'em."

Beekman became suddenly agitated. "You don't mean twenty dollars for each and every," he affirmed with enraged distinctness, opening the stove door and spitting in with animation. "You mean twenty dollars for the lot."

"No, I don't mean no twenty dollars for the lot," insisted Van Wormer. "I mean just identically what I said. Straub the barber told me so

hissself. He was up there and took his family, too; went with the dominie. And he says, says he, "Them there Shippendales brought twenty dollars apiece."

"Are you sure they was the ones I sold for a dollar each?" asked Billy, in a weak voice.

"Sure, I'm sure. Straub said so — the same identical ones."

Billy Beekman lapsed back in a wilted mass, and chewed his tobacco for some time in silence.

"Guess Billy ain't so awful much in a business dicker after all," commented Pete Mattice to the others in an audible aside. "Eh, Billy?"

Beekman looked up at Van Wormer on the counter.

"Say! that lunnytic asylum you spoke of t'other night — is it filled yet?"

"No. I got some accommodations left. Why?"

"'Cause," said Billy, "I think I'll need a room there myself." And he lapsed back into a nicotine silence that lasted the residue of the evening.



CHAPTER IV



JANET BLAKE had stopped for Mrs. Corbin, and together they were on their way to the wee tidy cottage of Agnes Lawyer.

"Do you think she'll take it?" asked Janet of the other, with an eagerness of inflection. "Because with her at the head of it, I know the thing will work."

"We'll just make her accept," said Mrs. Corbin. "Oh, you don't know how persuasive I can be, once I get my heart set on a thing."

"Don't I?" commented Janet, with a visible lifting of the eyebrows.

"But that wasn't nice of me,"

hastily added Mrs. Corbin. "It isn't you or I or any other person that carries a thing through to permanent success. If the Hillport Neighbourhood Association is to prevail against the odds that are against us, it will be by the workings of the Stronger-than-we."

"I do hope something will move upon Aunt Agnes to incline her to this work," said Janet. "For I confess, besides her I don't know another whom I'd like to trust to take charge of it."

"We shall see what we shall see," was the elder woman's reply. And they drew up before the cottage gate.

Aunty Agnes was engaged in making a binder for her magazines.

"Just see how you've inspired me to creative ardour," she exclaimed as they came in; and she held up her half-finished work. "I've devised it quite of myself. And the cheapest way imaginable for preserving periodicals. I wonder I never thought of it before. See, you use ever so many times repeatedly the same board covers; it's only the back needs to be changed each time."

"Fine!" exclaimed Mrs. Corbin. And from Janet:

"Aunty Agnes, you've been selected by the committee to be the paid custodian of the Hillport Public Library."

Aunty Agnes laid her work on to the table, and resumed her seat, quietly attentive.

"Now you mustn't say no," continued the other. "You've just got to accept."

Aunty Agnes sat for a minute or two in pensive quiet — a silence, charged, electric. Then she spoke.

"I have felt through all my conscious years that I was being made ready for a work of some kind. And I'm sure the summons you bring me is to a field in every way congenial. But I don't just see — We haven't any building for a library; and as to my house here, it's too —"

"Janet here has it all worked out," put in Mrs. Corbin. "It's the finest plan ever was devised. The people would never come to a library. So the idea is to take the library to them. Put it on wheels, in other words, and carry it to their front gate every so often. In plain English, you're to have a horse and buggy to distribute books and periodicals to the houses, and in this way keep the library and its facilities constantly before the people."

"But, Mrs. Corbin, I never drove a horse in my life."

"That doesn't matter in the least," put in Janet eagerly. "I've got a horse my daddy gave me seven years ago. It was an old horse, be-

cause he wouldn't trust me to go out alone with any other. And now — well, when I suggested to daddy yesterday that I'd like to present Sugar — that's the horse's name — to the Hillport Public Library, he up and replied: 'Do you mean to say that there's a living mortal will take Sugar as a gift?' 'Of course,' said I; 'I've asked the committee, and they say they'll be glad of him.' 'It's a go!' said he, bringing down his fist just like that. 'And it's the one sensiblest thing the Hillport Neighbourhood Association has proposed — a dead horse for a dead town. Take them up quick on it. It'll save me shooting the creature; that Sugar has been on my mind for some months now.' So that's the fiery steed you'd have. Besides, as chairman of the library committee I'd have to be your driver and go around with you for some time, to help get the thing going."

"But the books, and other material?" queried Auntie Agnes, who was visibly enthusing.

"Oh, we've thought of that too," replied Mrs. Corbin. "We've got a little money on hand, to buy some standard sets outright. Then there must be loads of good books we can scrape up from our homes — why do we need such big private libraries, if there is one on wheels coming regularly to our door? And as to periodicals, a

lot of us are going to pool these also, instead of pigging them all to ourselves."

"Let me think it over," pleaded the little woman, who was more visibly moved each moment, so wide open were swinging the gates of long-pent emotion within her. The two, noticing this, did as she pleaded, having obtained permission to come within a few days for the answer.

Janet was the most excited of all, when finally Aunt Agnes announced that she would take hold, and see what she could do with the thing. "And now we must start in right away," exclaimed the youthful chairman of the library committee. "I wonder how it would be best to start in" — this to Mrs. Corbin.

"We'll call a meeting of the committee for to-night," said the older woman. "Come, Janet, we'll go back home and get the telephone busy right away."

"No," she said, while they were en route; "there's a meeting of the whole association scheduled for to-morrow night at the schoolhouse. Wouldn't it be better to bring it before them?"

"All right," said Janet. "And then, when they see that we're making progress in our department, it will help spur the others on."

The next night, accordingly, the library committee had a most engaging report to give. And

received a salvo of applause. Dagner suggested that as a first step they get up a letter to be mailed to every householder in the town, city folk and village folk alike, explaining that the library would drive up in front of their doors in a few days, to give and take.

"Good idea," commented Corbin. "Of course there's a danger that some of our calumniators will call the Hillport Public Library a one-horse affair. But I guess we can stand that, can't we Miss Blake? You know, in the business world we have a motto: 'If people talk about your firm, put them on your pay roll; it doesn't matter what they say, provided they say it.'"

"And in this connection," put in Mrs. Cushman, "it has occurred to me that we will be sending out various kinds of announcements from time to time. Why wouldn't it be helpful if the association had an emblem of some kind; we could print it on our letter head. 'Twould give us an identity."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Mr. Corbin. "Hal, it takes the women to introduce the fine esthetic note."

The idea was adopted. For an emblem the suggestion was made of a circle with "Hillport Neighbourhood Association" circumferential; and a pair of clasped hands in the centre. Dagner proposed that the date of the town's original

settlement be included, together with the current year. This would memorialize both the beginning of Hillport and the beginning of the association that was to make Hillport worth while to have been settled. Besides, by linking the two dates thus, it would be a reminder ever and anon of the long background of history against which these new developments in Hillport have their setting.

The emblem in this form was in process to be accepted, when Mrs. Corbin asked if the clasped hands hadn't been a bit overworked in heraldic devices of late:

"Can't we express the same idea more newly? For instance, why wouldn't an open and stretched-out hand be less pretentious; and therefore wear better?"

"Corbin, the women for the exquisitely apt and fit," commented Cushman. "Besides, the wide-open hand would not only be emblematic of the hospitality which forms our association's groundwork; it would likewise be a reminder to some of us of the colony folk that the association treasury is ever willing to acknowledge gifts which come to us — untied. And the stretched-out hand, widely opened, hints at open purses; that we may consecrate our growing prosperity to communal beauty and social idealism. Not that we wish to introduce a sordid note, Mrs.

Corbin, into your admirable suggestion. But we men have to remember that in an undertaking such as we are ventured upon, the financial side is not to be despised. One of our tasks will have to be, to inaugurate a new standard of community expenditure." And it was so agreed of all.

A few mornings after, Van Wormer came in and occupied his seat on Bassler's counter earlier than usual. There was even a look almost of eagerness on his normally impassive and stolid features as he waited for the clan to gather.

"A bit early this morning, ain't you?" remarked Bert Re Qua, the clerk. "You and your woman been having it again?"

"No, we hain't been havin' it again? But I've got something to show to the boys this mornin'; that's why I'm on time. What's more, it ain' early at all — 'cept to young snipper-snappers like you who spark the girls half the night, and so can't git up of a mornin'." Thereupon he shut up tight, until the last one — as usual, Billy Beekman — had dragged his slow bulk in through the door and up around the stove. Van Wormer — with due deliberation — pulled a letter out of his pocket and unfolded it.

"Got yourn, I suppose," and he showed the letter to the others. "Mine come this mornin'."

No. None of them had seen it yet.

"Well, I'll read it to you." He knocked the ashes from his pipe on to the counter, brushed them off with his coat sleeve, cleared his throat, and began in a nasal drawl:

"To the People of Hillport [that's me and you and the rest of us]. To the People of Hillport: A public library has been started for our community, and we are sending out this letter in order to gain for this undertaking your coöperation; for we covet the help of all. The plan is to make it a coöperative institution in the truest sense. If each of us will lend to the library our periodicals and some of our books, we can then draw from the common supply in return. Thus will be multiplied many fold the reading facilities available in our community. It is hoped to have things in readiness by the latter part of this week. And, inasmuch as the homes of our township are scattered, a horse and carriage have been furnished the librarian to the end that she may keep the privileges proffered by this institution before our attention without cease. No charge whatsoever will be made. In order that it may be a circulating library in the fullest sense of the word, we are merely asked to loan freely as well as borrow freely.

"Yours for a richer and fuller community life.

"HILLPORT NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION."

He finished reading, refolded the letter, and placed it back into his pocket in silence.

Pete Mattice, who had dropped in on the group in time to hear the letter, pulled a plug of tobacco from his trousers pocket, bit off a liberal segment, and passed it on to the others. When it had completed its circulation of the company and had been restored to its safety vault in his trousers pocket, he observed:

"I guess we're going to get culture now for sure pop. Eh? which are you going to start in on, Billy. 'History of the Spanish War, by Josephus'; or 'Barriers Burned Away'?"

Billy, lost in the sweetness of the fresh cud he was chewing, was a bit slow in grasping Pete's remark. Therefore, while he was laboriously pondering, Capt. Paul spoke up:

"All I can say is this: My house is my castle, and if they try to peddle any of their book-larnin' into my door, I'll throw it into the road. That's what I'll do."

"And so will I," said Billy, who by this time had caught up. "I don't want none of their Sunday-school tracts around litterin' up my premises. When I want that sort of stuff, I'll go to church and git it. Not before." And he expectorated his contempt into the wood-box.

"I'm real sorry to see you shy away from culture like that," remarked Van Wormer, from beside the coffee grinder. "Now a nice book like

'Pilgrim's Progress,' by John Milton, would do you a world of good, Billy. "Twould improve your mind. And I guess some improvement wouldn't come amiss," he added, with a wink at the others and tapping his forehead knowingly.

"And I hear tell that they're a-goin' to peddle their readin' stuff through Shantytown, too," put in Borst, whose mentality was wontedly a bit slow to get into action, perhaps through a congenital conservatism in its makeup. "'They're gittin' Eyetalian books and Eyetalian papers for 'em. Frank Straub told me so — I was a-settin' in the barber shop yisterday. I've said it all along — them Dagos ain't no good. And the sooner Hillport gits rid of 'em, the better."

"Don't you lose no sleep over that," said Pete. "I know them dirty Dagos. And the minnit ever they see a library wagon a-comin' their way — well, they'll finish that library wagon, that's all. It'll be too bad, in a way; I'd hate to see Aunty Agnes git hurt. Because she don't mean wrong to anybody. But it'll teach her a lesson."

Despite these unfavourable prognostications, the library committee went unrestingly forward with their plans. And before long they saw their dream objectify itself into a something of solid reality.

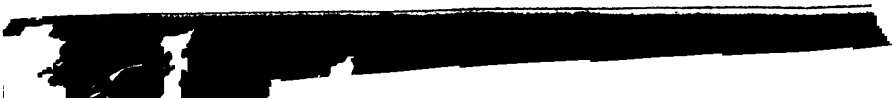
Books were obtained from a number of sources. It was found that the state had made provision for encouraging the establishment of public libraries, by offering a grant of \$100 annually for books. The committee took advantage of this. After satisfying the authorities that the proposed library was bona fide, they had no difficulty in getting the grant. In fact, they found that the state maintained a bureau at the capital for the purpose of pushing the library idea, and that their efforts were eagerly seconded by the officials in charge. Furthermore, the state department of education had a "travelling library" plan, whereby boxes of fifty books were shipped to responsible parties for a certain length of time, the only cost being the express charges. The committee made application for one of these boxes, selecting the books they thought best suited to Hillport's population, and were delighted to find that they could change these at any time by simply paying transportation costs.

Still a third source of supply was opened. One Sunday morning Mr. Dagner announced from the pulpit that by request of the library committee, the following Sunday had been appointed a "Library Sunday." He would give an address, he said, on the value and use of literature, and all who had books they were willing to contribute

to the free library should bring them on that occasion.

"Library Sunday" proved a most interesting event. Dagner spoke from the text, "Of making many books there is no end." Inasmuch as the stream of new books is ceaseless, he drew the moral that people should not hoard their supply, but hand on a good book straightway, to bless some other mind. The lesson was timely, and for some Sundays thereafter donations of books were brought as a regular accompaniment of church attendance. In these ways a collection of nearly a thousand books was got together. Moreover, the same motto of "Hand me along" was followed with regard to magazines, all of the public-spirited people of the community being asked to give their magazines to the librarian as soon as they were through with them. So Aunt Agnes had no difficulty in keeping her stock continually fresh, wherewith to tempt languid literary appetites.

It was not long before the sight of Sugar and a two-wheeled cart, with Aunt Agnes driving and a supply of books and periodicals in boxes, fore and aft, had become a familiar sight along the Hillport streets. Ostensibly stopping at the houses to collect books and magazines, she had the tact to hint of her wares before leaving, in such a way as



to excite an interest. And she usually contrived on saying good-bye to make an appointment to call again. It was not long before she had a schedule for visiting the various parts of the village once a week.

Nor did she confine her trips within the village limits. Every highway leading out into the country districts was traversed, and her visits to the farmhouses were even more welcome than in the village. It was found that on many a farm were people who had long had a hankering after books and papers, but knew not just how to obtain them. Now the thing was brought to their door, and they jumped at the opportunity thus offered to become introduced to the world of literature. With those farmers whose taste for general reading had never been awakened, she usually found that an entering wedge could be inserted by offering them books that were strictly vocational — works on scientific farming, dairy-ing manuals, hints on stock raising, poultry magazines, and the like. She thus obtained the entrée of the home, and soon found it easy to leave a book of history or a standard novel. Periodicals were also left, on the excuse that there was an especially timely article on such-and-such a subject, which some one in that home had mentioned once upon a time; and the magazine, thus intro-

duced, generally made friends for itself and was sought after from that time forth.

An entrance into some homes was obtained through the children. Where both the father and mother were closed mentally against the very name of books and reading, the children could usually be depended upon to show an interest, and the committee, with rare foresight, had got together an unusually large supply of children's books and magazines. So the librarian in a real sense of the word soon came to be known as the children's friend; and with a visitor as adroit as Auntie Agnes, it was not difficult, after the children's wants had been supplied, to turn the conversation to some book or magazine article of interest to the grown-ups. The "book-buggy" became in very truth a missionary of good literature, and many were the farmer mothers and fathers who greeted joyfully the appearance of the familiar vehicle down the road. The reading matter thus provided helped to make the farm life congenial to the children, and ameliorated the terrific isolation that so often accompanies agricultural existence.

It was interesting to hear her tell of her experience, and the way she got the right books into the hands of the young people. Girls would pester her to keep a bigger supply of love stories: "Auntie Agnes, why don't you have more of 't"

nice books? You know what I mean — the kind where they get married and live in a fine house ever afterwards. All of your books are these dull histories, and poultry stuff."

"Tut, tut, girl," Aunty Agnes would answer. "Guess you haven't looked through the box lately. No, I mean that other box, there in the front of the cart. Why, I've got some of the most thrilling love novels you ever read. Here's a whole set of them, the Waverly Novels. These are the kind, you know, that sell in the book stores in paper covers. But so many people hereabouts wish to read them that I've had them bound in cloth to preserve them."

And to the boys:

"Tom, don't you want a Wild West story about Indians? I've only got one left this week, because all the boys are just crazy to get them. Here it is: 'Last of the Mohicans,' by Fenimore Cooper. Make your hair stand on end. See this picture in the front, of Indians making an attack on the white men's fort. You say you never read a book before? Well, I'll let you have this if you'll take good care of it and give it back next week; because the other boys want it as soon as you get through. But better not read it just before going to bed, because you'll get so excited, you won't sleep much." And Tom

thereupon would be launched on to the vast rich ocean of the intellectual life, a desire whetted within him for the treasures of imaginative literature.

It wasn't long before she had established a sub-station out at Dogtown. Dogtown is a settlement some two miles out of Hillport, in a nook of the hills called Polly Holler. The houses there are scattered, some of them nestling away in clearings up in the woods and reached only by lanes and footpaths. To visit these regularly would have taken too much of Aunty Agnes' time. So she found a farmer's wife there who had taught a district school before she had married — Mrs. Fred Pindar. They were the one prosperous family in all those parts, and therefore natural leaders. She induced Mrs. Pindar to make her house a sub-station. Each week Aunty Agnes would come with a fresh exchange of books. Whereupon good Mrs. Pindar, sometimes by means of a personal trip up some mountain lane, would distribute them into the homes. The children were the ones mostly reached — to the older generation reading was an alien art. Even with the children, the books had to be of the simplest, and picture magazines were most in demand.

One book, however, was kept in circulation perpetually; in fact was "lost" on three separate

occasions, until menaces of an extreme rigour induced it to be "found" again and returned. It was an illustrated manual on basket-making. A number of the inhabitants of Dogtown had done time in the state's prison. Had there been taught the basket-making trade. And had made it — thanks to the favourable reeds that grew thickly along Dogtown Creek — the principal industry of that region. Accordingly the illustrated book on "Basket Making as a Fine Art" found here an appreciative and expert clientele.

Mention of Dogtown shall have to be made in these pages again. For it was destined to play a part — tragic part, it was — in the series of events here chronicled.

One day Janet Blake came to the Corbin home in a glow of excitement. The state library bureau had been desirous for some time to have a convention of the library workers of that part of the state, but had found no one of sufficient leadership to take hold of the thing. It seems that news of the Hillport horse-and-cart idea had reached them so favourably that they had written to Miss Blake about a convention. She had offered them the use of her home for a day's session, and now was come to get the help of the Corbins in entertaining the visitors. She was not only successful in this, but Mr. Corbin agreed to take care of the

matter of getting the visitors to and from the Blake home to the station.

Librarians from towns even thirty miles distant were present on the day of the convention. The morning session was devoted to a library round-table. Through the help of the state bureau, cards had been sent beforehand asking each librarian to check off the subject which she wished to have discussed. Unanimously, the vote showed that "library financing" was the theme weighing most heavily on them all. This was the subject, therefore, of the round-table. And now came out a curious fact: Although all of the forty-odd people present were in the active work, most of them were uninformed of the generous provisions contained in the state laws for the aid of struggling public libraries. For instance, there was one provision whereby a free library was entitled to apply to the village board for funds not to exceed ten cents for every book it had circulated that year. A gold mine, and which had remained undiscovered, all their long months of penury. Luncheon followed. The afternoon was spent in the private comparison of experiences. More than one went home prepared to introduce a horse and cart in their work at the earliest opportunity.

One night at the store Jim Borst made mention

of the custom of fishing through the ice, up in the North Woods.

"What do you know about the North Woods?" asked Captain Paul. "You never been there in your life."

"But a fellow can read, can't he? I was a-lookin' over a maga ——" but he stopped short, guiltily.

"You been goin' to that there library thing, have you?" twitted Van Wormer, taking his pipe from his mouth by way of emphasis and scorn. "Huh! They drove up to my house t'other day. I wouldn't let 'em inside the door."

"Nor I didn't either," put in Captain Paul. "Told 'em I was all stocked up on readin' matter, and couldn't take no more culture just now."

"Well, I didn't go after it; neither did I just exactly turn it away," explained Jim. "She come along in a buggy, and knocked at the door. And I sort of said, 'Come in.' And do you know, she didn't come to leave no books nor nothin' of that sort. All she wanted was to know if I didn't have some magazines and papers that I was through with, and would let her have to pass on to those in our community who hain't got no readin' matter in their home. And I wasn't a-goin' to be so all-fired tight-fist as to turn down a real reasonable request like that. So I told her

I had some back copies of the Hillport *Globe* she could have; 'cause they come regular ev'ry week, and some weeks I don't git around to read it. And I didn't see why I can't help a little in handin' on things to them as haven't got 'em. And Auntie Agnes was very thankful; and took 'em to carry to a family down the pike here that she says hain't had a paper in their house from one month's end to another."

"But what's that got to do with fishing in the North Woods?" asked Captain Paul.

"Well, it was this way: As she was a-goin' away with the papers, she happened to mention that she had some magazines on fishin', with coloured pictchers, for the children if they'd care to have 'em at any time. And I said, that 'air brat of mine is clean crazy about fishes, and if she had any pictchers, why —— And she up and went out to the buggy and come back with an armful as big as that. And I was just natchelly lookin' through 'em before the brat come back from school — becuz in the summertime I sometimes like to do a little fishin' myself — when I stumbled on these pictchers about how they do things in the North Woods, and I ——"

"You people don't know nothin' about the sort of stuff that 'air library wagon peddles," put in Joe Van Dike, who had been listening off on the

outskirts. "Aunty Agnes can come to my house and bring some more of them magazines about huntin' and trappin' and that book on turkeys with pictchers all red and green, any time she wants to. And I'll say, 'Come right in, Aunty Agnes; good for sore eyes to see you.' Them's my sentiments. And I don't care who knows it."

"And mine, too," insisted Jim, doggedly; his courage heightened now that he had a partner in his guilt. "I tell you them pictchers of fishes and sailboats and such like, with readin' matter attached—why, they were uncommon interestin'."

"I can't say as I see any harm in readin' books of that sort," observed Captain Paul judicially, to the rest.

"Well," admitted Van Wormer between puffs, "she can leave the papers at the house for my woman to read. But I won't look at 'em. I promise you that. This public library thing is too highfalutin' for a plain village like Hillport, and ought never to have been started."



CHAPTER V

the coming of the spring, a new impetus was given to the work of the Hillport Neighbourhood Association. This was furthered by Parson Dagner's use of the Easter festival this year to make a plea for Hillport's resurrection from its long death into a newness of life. It was a new interpretation of that event to most of the people; and it took. The association put the coping-stone to it by appointing a Saturday two weeks later to be "Hillport's Resurrection Day." It was to be a clean-up day, as a matter of prosaic fact. "But what's the use of prose when you can

lift a thing into the poetic?" said Corbin, and the rest agreed with him. Announcement was sent everywhere that on the morning in question a cart would go through the streets and collect free of charge all rubbish found in barrels in front of any lot. The custom formerly had been for each household to dispose of its refuse in its own way. Which meant that two thirds of them failed to do it at all, and the other third deposited the year's accumulation down beside the big bridge — because it was near; with the result, a growing eyesore at that spot.

With the establishment of a Community Clean-up Day, the idea now became infectious. It spread even to the indifferent households. Yes, to this class most of all. Because here was an opportunity for them to dispose of their rubbish without cost; and they had large accumulation of it. Therefore, when the cart went around on the Saturday morning announced, the sidewalks were lined with jetsam and flotsam incidental to human existence's wear-and-tear. It was carted to an excavation made many years before in constructing the railroad, and which in rainy weather ever since had been a stagnant pool. Furthermore, a mysterious gift of \$25 to the association made it possible to remove the long accumulation from the old dump beside the bridge approach, to the new

depository. The net result of "Hillport's Resurrection Day" was a clean-up of three fourths of the village backyards, the removal of the rubbish heap which had for years blemished the roadway across the bridge, and the partial obliteration of the malarial puddle alongside the railway embankment; and — perhaps the greatest blessing of all — the impartation of a new significance in Easter Day as a reminder to the people of the need of a village resurrection each springtide; an annual day of education, therefore, in community consciousness and civic beauty.

It happened that, not many days after, a near-drowning took place at a dangerous point on the bay shore known as "The Ledge." Two young girls were wading there. One of them got beyond her depth, because of the treacherous bottom, and would have been carried down by the swift tide had it not been for some Italians returning from work that afternoon. It then came to light that the girls had been wading in that perilous spot because all of the safe and commodious section of the beach was taken up by private boat and bath houses, so that the public at large was excluded.

"Of course there's only one thing to do," said one of the women, at the next meeting of the Neighbourhood Association. "We've got to provide a public bathing-beach."

"Hal," said John Corbin, turning to Cushman, who was chairman that night, "suppose you and I look into the thing and see if there aren't some possibilities. The thing looks to me to have self-supporting features, if handled properly." So it was agreed that these two would be a ways-and-means committee, while Dagner and Rivenburg were delegated to see if a site could be obtained.

The latter committee had easy sledding. The near-tragedy had stirred the entire community. Therefore when application was made to the town — in whom the fee vested — for one of the boathouse sites, an option was granted without delay. (The town board had begun to glimpse the power of public opinion when that prime mobile is aroused and put into play.) The part assigned to Corbin and Cushman was by no means so simple. The thing at best was an experiment, with no precedents that they knew of, and like all experiments, of uncertain outcome. However, something had to be done, and quickly, for the summer was approaching. Therefore, the option was closed and the leap taken.

The largest boathouse on the water front was secured by the association. A scrubbing inside and out, with three days' work by a painter and a carpenter, put a new face on the premises. A

bathing master was hired for the season, to have charge of the property, and to keep a guardian eye on the bathers. The person secured for this position was none other than Paul Mattice himself, of the "Cracker-Barrel Council." His selection caused a deal of talk, for he was known to be antagonistic to the city colony and all its works. But with his appointment to the post a change in his psychology took place. He was "Captain Paul" now of his own right, and it wrought an expansiveness in his being. He became laugh-some and cheery, and took hold of the work with gusto.

Two days a week were set aside for the exclusive use of girls and women; the residue, for boys and men. Tickets for the use of a dressing-room were ten cents each, while for five cents additional Captain Paul provided a clean towel, soap, and a pail of fresh water. In a few weeks, prompted thereunto by insistent requests for the articles, he put in a line of fishing tackle and bait, which he rented out by the day.

The thing paid a good share of its expenses after the first month. Captain Paul prided himself on the position he held, and discharged its responsibilities with fine fidelity. He kept order, maintained a high measure of neatness, and was proud to offer his services in teaching young and

old to swim. Parents now perceived that their children were safer in his hands than anywhere else. They readily parted with the ticket money to be relieved of anxiety for their safety for an afternoon — and also to get rid of the children's pestering; for the place was popular with the youngsters from the opening day, and their clamour to go there was not to be denied.

"I declare, that there bath rigamajig started by them Neighbourhood Association people wasn't a half bad idea," commented Van Wormer to the circle of cronies at Bassler's store one afternoon — they were sitting out on the railing of the stoop now, seeing that the weather had become warm. "But somehow I wish Captain Paul hadn't gone into the thing. It don't seem just right."

The Neighbourhood Association was now in high feather. It had lived through its first year, was growing in membership stalwartly, and already had a record of concrete accomplishment. It was no longer an experiment or a fad. It felt that now it could take itself seriously. Therefore, it ventured into the biggest undertaking ever; it entered politics.

Mrs. Corbin broached the matter to her husband one evening on his return home from the city. Her impatience had with difficulty abided the arrival of the 5:19 train that evening. And as

soon as the automobile had rolled up to the door and the kiss of greeting had accomplished itself, she brought up the subject:

"John, you've got to get yourself chosen a member of the Hillport Public School Board." The serious intonation wherewith she spoke it struck alarm into the heart of him. He threw himself into the nearest chair, the very image of consternation:

"What! I go into politics! Heavens and earth, Barbara, I'd do anything for you — except of course, when an utter impossibility is — that is, I know you wouldn't ask me to get behind a fizzle; and that's what this — But see here, you haven't explained it to me yet."

"Well, I'm irate, that's what I am," said Mrs. Corbin. "That School Board isn't worth shucks, and I don't see any way out of it, John, but you'll just have to get in and change it. This is how it happened: We women had it all fixed up that a sewing class should be started for girls. It was Mrs. Barie's idea—to get a love for needle art abroad in the community once more. Auntie Agnes had agreed to teach it — said she'd be only too happy to give the time. The way that little woman is pouring herself into the work is the beautifullest sight ever; do you know, she takes the salary paid her as librarian, and buys books and magazines

to stock the library; that is, Janet Blake and I suspect it. Well, as I started to say, we asked the Board for permission to use the schoolhouse once a week for the sewing class. It wouldn't have interfered with their schedule in the least, because our plan was to hold the class on Saturday afternoons, when girls like to meet together anyway. And what do you think? They up and said no. Turned it down flat. Said they couldn't be bothered with these frills and new-fangled notions that are pestering School Boards everywhere in these days. 'Readin', Ritin', and Rithmetic' — that's what education should consist of, nothing more. Oh, they put the foot down good and hard, I can tell you. And it wasn't going to cost them a cent, mind you; we had that part all arranged. John Corbin, some of you men have just got to get in on the inside, and sweep the dust and cobwebs out of that School Board."

"But, Barbara, you don't understand. I'd have to be selected by the votes of the people. It isn't a volunteer office; it's elective. Which would mean campaigning, electioneer work, drumming up votes, working the political machinery." Hereupon he discovered that he had not removed his overcoat or gloves, so great was the agitation into which his wife's ultimatum — to John Corbin even the slightest request from his wife had

usually the force of an ultimatum — had cast him. Excusing himself for a moment, he stepped up to his room, and removed the accoutrements of travel.

“Now if this were New York State,” said he, on returning, his brow wrinkling into a horseshoe because of the interior perturbation, “the thing might not be so impossible. Because there the election laws have become fairly decent. But here in this forsaken and forgotten area of creation, to try to do anything in that line would be — and yet, if you say so, of course we’ll ——” and John Corbin became suddenly thoughtful a moment. “By George, girl, it’s a go!” and he slapped his hands down on his knees. “It’s got to be done some time or other. I’ve seen it all along. Politics is a muddy road and miserably unpleasant to travel; but it’s square ahead of us and not to be dodged. And I suppose I’m no better than any one else, to be a pathfinder and pioneer a way through the thing. There, I’ll do it! It’s settled. Come, let’s go in to dinner.” And, offering his arm to his wife, he led her into the dining-room.

When it was noised abroad that the Neighbourhood Association was going into politics and had nominated candidates for all three of the vacancies on the School Board, excitement fermented through the town in liveliest fashion. The city

colony to mix up in local politics — it was an unheard-of thing! Moreover, the present case had an additional innovation which redoubled the horror of it: the other two candidates with Corbin on the ticket were a bright young man in the village named Re Qua, clerk in Bassler's store, and — a woman! Dagner had persuaded one of his stand-bys in the church, a woman of force in Hillport affairs, Mrs. Dan Frisbie, to accept the nomination.

The community was shocked through and through. A woman in politics! Since Hillport had been founded, it had not been seen after this fashion. What was the world coming to? It might be all right for daring innovations to come and with their troubling presence disturb other departments of life. But when the new-fangled ideas laid their upheaving hand on the home and enticed wife and mother from hearthstone sanctities — it was high time to call a halt.

Brother George Vroman, an elder in the church and for long years a pillar, was scandalized. He went to Sister Frisbie and with tears pleaded with her to withdraw her name. This was a move of some courage on his part, for she had a somewhat self-dependent mind, and a pair of eyes that could flash indignant fire. None the less, he waited upon her in her home and declared unto her the

testimony that had been entrusted unto him. Unsuccessful in the errand (in fact, he came away from the interview with a grieved look, as though his feelings had been injured), he went around everywhere working against the ticket. Brother Vroman, anyway, had been ill at ease for a long time back over the route that the Hillport church had chosen. He perceived that Parson Dagner was becoming secularized. It wasn't the place of a church, he insisted, to take any interest in worldly matters. Let her stick to the gospel. "He that saveth souls is wise." The work of religion, as anybody knows, is to snatch sinners from this lost and unregenerate world, this vale of sorrows and sink of iniquity, as brands are snatched from the burning.

Mrs. Frisbie passed his house one morning, some days later, and saw him working in his garden. She beckoned to him imperiously from the sidewalk. He stopped his work, and, hoe in hand, came up to the fence.

"George Vroman, I want to speak a word to you," and she speeded a look that noticeably quailed him. (He remarked once that to look into Sister Frisbie's eyes when she was in one of her moods gave him a feel at though he were looking down the loaded barrel of a gun.) "What do you mean," said she, "by all the time working

against Mr. Dagner, and our Neighbourhood Association that is trying to put some spirit and decency into this town?"

"Sister Frisbie," said he, "the growing worldliness of Brother Dagner is weighing heavily upon my spirit. What we need in this town is a gospel-preaching pulpit. For the times are evil; wickedness is waxing more and more."

"And it will keep on waxing — and waxing and waxing, unless you and the likes of you wake up and help us do something. Hillport is dead; that's what it is. And you people are helping to bury it."

"Sister Frisbie ——"

"Oh, don't 'Sister Frisbie' me. I'd like to know why a woman hasn't got a right to be on the School Board as well as a man. I've got children, haven't I, the same as you? And what is being done, I'd like to know, to save our boys and girls? Life here is so poky and dull, the boys that are able to, pack up and leave as soon as they are in long pants, and the rest drift to the saloon. A pretty School Board we've got! We had a teacher in this school once — Professor Keyser — the finest a school ever had. Did the School Board pay him salary enough to keep him? Or did they groan about the taxes — oh, those everlasting taxes! And what's the school amounted

— M. R. O. U.

to since? Nigh onto a new teacher every year. If you men haven't got gumption enough for a School Board, why don't some of you have the grace to step aside and give us women a chance? That's all I stopped to say." And she whisked off down the street.

Pete Mattice, as political boss of the town, was glad of Brother Vroman's assistance in combating this dangerous radicalism in our country's political system. Pete was not running for the School Board himself, but he was energetic to preserve the old Board intact — he sensed danger to his political proprietorship should a break occur anywhere along the line. Therefore he used Vroman to work with the better element in the town, while he took care of "the boys."

"The interference of them city swells in our affairs is a thing we can't allow, nohow," he insisted, in his daily harangues in Bassler's store. "There's no tellin' where it might lead to. If a man like that there John Corbin got elected to the School Board, he'd itch to go on after other offices, becuz he's got the political bee a-buzzin' in his bonnet; anybody can see that. He wants office. I tell you it's a crisis in the affairs of Hillport, that's what it is." And pulling a plug of tobacco from his pocket, he helped himself and passed it around to the others.

"Aw, it ain't this city crowd that I kick against so much as it is the wimmin a-mixin' up in politics," snorted Van Wormer from his seat on the bread hamper, as he bit a generous segment from the plug and handed it on to the next. "That's the objection I've got to this high-toned ticket they're puttin' up. Wimmin's place is to home, with their dish-washin' and babies. Guess they've got 'nough to do there, 'thout pokin' their nose in our affairs," and he spat across to the other side of the store, by way of emphasizing his contempt.

"That's identically what I say, too," put in Pete warmly. "This threat of female domination is a thing no free-born American citizen can stand fer a minnit. So don't fergit to be on hand and vote early. And git the rest of our crowd out, too. Drum 'em up, sick or well. By the by, don't harp too much about Mrs. Frisbie when the women are around. Because some of them petticoats may git fired up to stand by their own sex — see? — and vote, spite of all we can do. When you're with them, hammer home the city colony and their invasion of our rights as owners of this here town, where our fathers and forefathers forever were born and bred and are buried. That's the cue. So long. I've got to go and round the rest of the folks into line."

It was known that Pete and his crowd had made

considerable hay among the village folk. To compensate for which, the "New Idea" ticket, as the association's candidates were called, made a canvass of the farming districts. And here, thanks to the popularity won for them by Aunt Agnes and her "buggy of books," they met a good reception. The library had also raised up for them friends in the Italian quarter. For the sinister predictions of the "Cracker-Barrel Council" here had not been realized. Tony Rebito had made for Aunt Agnes a welcome in Shantytown. With chivalry its inhabitants received her. And when she added to her stock a supply of books and journals in Italian, their regard for her intensified into something of affection. All of which was of account now. It was found that Rebito had taken out naturalization papers. He discovered two or three others similarly privileged. Which votes in a contest as close as this were a valued contribution.

The school election that year was a notable event in Hillport's history. It is still talked about. Women who had never voted before came out this time and cast a ballot, their hearts fluttering within them because of the unfamiliarity of the thing. Corbin and his followers were fairly confident of success. A thorough canvass of the probabilities in the case had shown

a balance in their favour. Nevertheless they did not relax their diligence. They had watchers and scouting parties — followed the thing up to the last minute, and in every detail.

Finally, at about nine o'clock that night — the school basement was the polling place — the returns had been counted, and the result known. The Old Guard had triumphed — the "New Idea" ticket was defeated, and by a fairly large majority. "We give 'em a lambastin' for fair," Pete Mattice phrased it, exultantly.

Mrs. Frisbie, watching the count in person, burst into tears when the result was announced. But anger quickly superseded in her every other emotion. She looked over to the other side of the table, where George Vroman stood, and the flame in her eyes dried up the tears with promptitude. He detected a coming storm, and suddenly recollecting that he ought not to leave his wife alone, he remarked that he guessed he'd be starting for home; a look of care, the while, furrowing his countenance. Mrs. Frisbie started after him; but he quickened his stride, and is said to have got home in safety. Bert Re Qua, something of an impish and irrepressible spirit, took his share in the defeat with a bland good-nature:

"I'll bet a dozen clothespins," said he, "that Brother Vroman takes his Sunday afternoon

walks in another direction than up past the Frisbie home, for some moons to come."

Corbin went home to where his wife was awaiting the result. She met him at the door.

"Barbara," said he, "we have met the enemy; and we are theirs."



CHAPTER VI



defeat of the "New Idea" candidates in the School Board election was a blow to the Neighbourhood Association — the more so because expectation of success had been so sanguine. Therefore it was a dispirited group that assembled when next their meeting night came round. But that same evening light began to penetrate into the gloom. It was a speech by a man named Hendrick that did the enkindlement. R. H. Hendrick was one of the commuter colony, a hard-headed business man of the city. He had held off from the Neighbourhood Association for a long time,

because, as he explained, he had had experience with town-improvement societies, and they were usually the most amateurish and shortlived things he had known. But when the Hillport association showed its earnestness and grit by gettingsquarely into the town's political mix-up, he had warmed to the game and joined the association whole-naturedly. The meeting this night was at his house.

"No need of an attack of the dumps," said he. "The political campaign that has been waged was splendidly educational; it is going to count in days to come. Besides, it seems to me there's a lesson to be learned from it. And that is, the need of a deeper work than has hitherto been attempted. It costs too much to make a man over after he's forty. We must begin with the young. As I understand it, we are anxious to change not only Hillport's outside; we are trying to get for the people a new psychological environment; we must change their minds from an individualistic to a collective cast, put in them a spirit of community good-will. To do that, we've got to catch the man when he's a boy, while his brain cells are plastic."

The suggestion jumped with the temper of the meeting. "Catch the boy" became the watch-word. "And the girl, too," put in Mrs. Hal

Cushman. "Hillport needs better mothers; and that means an improvement of them back in the girlhood stage." So the motto was changed to "Catch the young!" And then and there was formed a "Committee on the Hillport Juniors."

A headquarters for this work with the young was obtained by securing an unused building near the depot, which had formerly been a barrel factory. The decay of Hillport's industries had long since put its blight upon this factory, and for a long time now the building had stood empty and barnlike, an increasing ruin year by year, blemishing the landscape. Therefore when the committee approached its owner, they secured free rent for the first two years, by agreeing to put the building and premises into first-class repair, and by paying the insurance and taxes — with a five years' option after that time.

In setting about to put the "Hillport Club House," as it was to be known, into shape, most of the committee thought that they would have to hire a contractor and force of men. But Hendrick put his foot down hard. "Never would do in a thousand years!" he insisted. "We'd simply be pauperizing the people — building a spick-and-span hall and then inviting them to come and use it. They'll appreciate it if they do the work themselves, and only so." He won the day.

Dagner, who had been made superintendent of the club, rounded the boys up one afternoon and told them of the plan: The Neighbourhood Association would provide money for the materials if the boys and their fathers would do the labour. The boys responded with gusto. A master-carpenter was hired to oversee the work. The boys' fathers gave their unemployed time and the boys themselves did the unskilled work, flocking there after school hours. So great was the enthusiasm that a wheelbarrow, filled with rubbish swept up in the building, became more zestful than a baseball bat. An expansiveness into something of dignity and proprietary seriousness was noticeable in the boys almost from the start. And although the alterations by this method took longer, Dagner said that the days spent by the boys in preparing their building were their best preparation for the club work itself. The girls, when their turn came to superintend the decorations and interior fittings, were equally interested.

At last the work was finished, and in a grand opening day the building was thrown open to the public. The ground floor had been made into one large room, fitted up as gymnasium and basket-ball court. The apparatus was simple and was made movable, so that the floor could be cleared for dances and public meetings. Up-

stairs, partitions made the space into smaller rooms for club purposes. Also, one room here was set apart for Aunt Agnes's headquarters for the public library, and became a reading-room for the club members. The basement was fitted with a shower bath and dressing-room. The water for the shower bath came from a reservoir in the second story, well water being pumped by a windmill on the roof, helped out — and softened — by rain water from the eaves. A furnace had been installed, with a water coil around its firebox for heating water for the baths.

Captain Paul was secured as caretaker. His work at the bathing beach was in the summer-time, when the clubhouse would not need to be open. Inasmuch as he lived all of the twelve months on practically the pay from those four summer months, he was found willing now to take on this winter work in addition, for a yearly salary not greatly in excess of what he had asked for the summer months alone. Two days each week the building was given over to the girls for gymnasium classes, basket-ball games, etc.; four days were for the boys.

The basement with its bath had been made with a separate outside entrance — for a purpose. Hendrick had persuaded the rest of his committee to a point of view that had long been his, namely,

that the cleavage between social classes is largely a matter of the bath tub. Let all the people be equally clean physically, and it will veto any serious tendency to group apart into undemocratic and provincializing stratification. Therefore, in planning the alterations, they had put in a hot-water boiler of spacious dimensions — “hot water regardless of cost!” was the way Hendrick phrased it; “it’s the cheapest investment society can make.” This, together with the independent entrance to the bath, permitted its use by the entire neighbourhood, adult as well as youth. Non-members paid five cents per bath, which included a small cake of soap and a towel. Because of the limited bathing facilities in most of the Hillport homes, this public bath soon became popular; which was furthered by the fastidious attention Captain Paul gave to keeping the bath and dressing-room cleanly. Furthermore, once they had learned its use, a shower bath was discovered to be something quite different from the tub sort, and to possess elements of pleasurable exhilaration not found in the other kind.

Shantytown also caught the spirit. Tony Rebito did missionary work so effectively that the workman there who failed now to avail himself of a hot bath at least once a week lost caste, became

pariah. Rebbit explained to those who remarked about it, the reason for his missionary spirit: "I wanta the men be clean. I owna some house in Shantytown. One, two, foura house. I clean up the house. But do they stay clean? No, signor. Uncleana peoples makea unclean house. So I says to all who renta the house from me: 'Takea the bath one time in the week, or youa stay not.' They takea the bath. And it help me very much. Cleana peoples makea the clean house."

Then came a problem: How could the Hillport Club House be used for developing a community consciousness in the young? To have made it purely an amusement centre would have been easy; but the committee felt that amusement alone would turn out a Happy-Hooligan type of young man to whom the responsibilities of Hillport in the years to come could not be safely entrusted. Therefore they devised a method which proved to be a stroke of genius. Through Dagner a few of the young people, both boys and girls, were formed into a "Junior Civic League." And into the hands of these was committed the control of the entire club. All of the young people of the town were permitted to use the building freely, by payment of the monthly dues. But the officers were elected only by the Junior

Civic League, and the details of government were handled by the league members.

In this way the meetings of the league each Tuesday night were made into events of importance. The meeting one week was given up to the business of the clubhouse, and on alternate weeks to questions of Hillport's improvement. At these latter meetings the Neighbourhood Association provided a speaker, or a theme for the members themselves to discuss, finding these bi-weekly events invaluable for keeping the work of the adult association before the young people and enlisting their coöperation.

It will be noticed that by this plan none of the young people of Hillport was compelled to join the Junior Civic League. Nevertheless it was found that little by little they wanted to join. The league was an inner circle, membership in which carried distinction. Furthermore, its meetings had dignity, because adults were admitted into it as honorary members, and some of them were usually present at the weekly assemblings. It was not long, therefore, before a steady stream of new members came into the league, presenting themselves voluntarily as candidates. The reception of these was made into something of a formal rite, wherein the newcomer pledged himself to strive for Hillport's improvement and for a community

well-being. Thus the principle of democracy in the government of the young people's club was fostered, without extending it disastrously. The governing body was limited to those young people who were high-minded enough to take Hillport's welfare seriously. And the others, coming in at first because of the prestige that attached to membership in the league, were not long in catching the higher note; or, if unwilling to catch it, they were dropped from the roll.

It was soon found that the club activities grew into so rich a complexity that Dagner could not carry them and his church work also. Therefore, a man was sought for the club work. It was found that the Y. M. C. A. had established what they call a "Rural Life Department," whose task is to do for the country districts what has long been done for the city youth. Most of the committee were for importing one of these leaders ready-made. But Hendrick fought the plan.

"That's just the trouble with our country districts," said he; "they go outside for leadership, and fail to develop their own native material. Young men will stay in their home town and build it up, if we make a place for them."

Dagner seconded Hendrick's position. Moreover, he said he knew a young chap that could probably fill the bill, Mat Wood. There was a gang

of grown-up boys in the village who hung around the street corners at night. They were shy of the clubhouse that had been started, and which looked to them to have an "uplift" squint about it. Even the gymnasium had failed to win them over. Wood was something of a leader among these, being older than the rest of them. Dagner rounded him up in his study one night, put the proposition before him, got him to consent to be the athletic director of the clubhouse. He was sent for a three-months' course of instruction to the Y. M. C. A. in the city; and on his return to Hillport was made secretary, creating for them there, with Hillport as the centre, a "County Y. M. C. A. Department."

It cannot be said that Mat Wood's entrance upon the work brought into it a vast amount of idealism. He was hardly of that type. But he was a natural leader of boys. And for the gymnasium end was an enthusiastic success. He had all the rest of his gang inside the club as members in shortest space of time. And won from them a heartiest loyalty. He was made superintendent of the physical activities; he took charge of the gymnasium classes; organized baseball, basketball, and football teams, tournaments, games, et cetera.

The expense of fitting up the building, when the

bills were finally all in, made the committee gasp; but Hendrick's enthusiasm was an energy not to be withstood. He had been slow in taking fire. But, now that the spark had caught — and he proved peculiarly inflammable to the interests of young people — he burned with a hot flame. He headed a subscription for the expenditures that had been made, and got others so infected with his zeal that the amount was raised without the need of much solicitation. Thereupon, with subscription paper in hand, he canvassed the summer colony in person, and secured signers to a yearly pledge fund for the running expenses. He explained that he had often done as much in raising funds for a golf tournament, and that this was even more fun.

One day the secretary of the Junior Civic League received a letter announcing that a sum of money had been deposited in the village bank the income of which — \$25 — was to go yearly to the young person in Hillport whose premises showed the greatest improvement in any one year. The donor's name was withheld; in fact, as in the case of the gift which had made possible the removal of the rubbish heap from the Vleet-skill bridge entrance, it was not known even to the members of the Neighbourhood Association.

The immediate effect of this — for the offer was

hailed by the young people — was the formation of a Camera Club. Stress had been laid by the donor on the point that the prize was not to be for the greatest residential beauty, but for the greatest progress toward residential beauty in any one year; that is, the basis of award was to be tendency rather than status. Therefore, in order to gauge the progress made in any twelvemonth, the condition of the premises at the beginning of the year had to be recorded. And the camera was called into use.

Janet Blake was the prime mover in this Camera Club; and in an art work for Hillport which followed therefrom, a work of some magnitude, as will be related. She didn't intend to take hold of it; as matter of fact she got into it in unexpected fashion, and really as a means of escape from another kind of work to which she was being entreated. It was during an afternoon's walk with Rev. Mr. Dagner that the idea came to her, and decision taken.

Miss Blake and he had formed the habit of long walks together, when the weather invited to roamings along the country lanes, and Dagner's pastoral visitings permitted to him an afternoon's leisure. Janet's interest in the community work that had been started gave them an infinite range of interests in common. Dagner came to

her often for counsel; indeed leaned upon her judgment heavily. Janet Blake in turn found these walks inspirational. She was at this time not at all churchly in her make-up; had even stopped going to the services — this as a concession to her father's temperament, for Old Man Blake was known to be vehemently a disbeliever in things religious. None the less, she was too serious minded a girl to spend herself unconcernedly in the trivial gayeties that absorbed most of the time of the colony set. And Dagner's manly cast of mind pleased her, particularly since he had become so finely serviceable in neighbourhood activities.

On the afternoon in question, Dagner had a purpose in leading Miss Blake out for a cross-country ramble. It was nothing less than to persuade her to take some work in the Sunday school.

"I'm not urging you to church attendance," he explained, after he had brought up the matter, the while they were walking along one of the lanes leading off from the turnpike, about the old mill-pond; "no one knows better than the person before you, how stupidly unintellectual the services must be to those who sit in the pews. But the Sunday school is different. There is a call to service. I have a group of young people that need Janet Blake — and Janet Blake needs them."

"What! An unbeliever teaching a class in Sunday-school? Daddy wouldn't wish it, even if I did. Which I don't. Perhaps you'll shudder when I tell you. But his skepticisms have infected me through and through. I like you, George Dagner" — she looked at him with a mirthful, audacious insolence — "but it is despite the ministerial part of you. Seriously, why don't you give up that poky old church? Not give up Hillport. I don't mean that. We need you here. But we'd create a new profession for you — social engineer, something like that. And you'd be free of those wearisome doctrinal fights with your board of elders. Brother Vroman and his set are not of your type. Why don't you come out from it all, and be a modernist?"

"But look you!" said he. "It was quite in order to secure you and your modernist views for these retrograde minds you mention, that I coveted you for the Sunday-school. You would have freesthand. You notice I imposed no requirements. On that liberal understanding, what possible obstacle could there be, in the mind either of you or your father?"

"The Bible," was Janet's laconic reply.

"Do you know, Miss Blake," and Dagner warmed into an intensity of tone, as their talk got into the deeper issues involved, issues where

his soul had fought many a solitary fight, "I find myself at times out of patience with this bugbear notion that so many people hold concerning the Bible. If I had asked you to come and teach a young people's class in Shakespeare or Dante, you would not have met it with scorn; would have given it fair consideration. The Bible is a library of grander literature than either Shakespeare or Dante. Yes, a library without a knowledge of which Shakespeare nor Dante nor any of the great authors is fully intelligible. The most influential book in history, is that. Is woven into the warp and texture of our race. To permit our young people to-day, yes, those of your summer colony as well as the villagers, to grow up ignorant of a book which is the foundation of so much of our literature and history and art — candidly, would it not be a fatal lowering of culture and mental seriousness for the generations that are to come after us?"

Their walk had led them into The Gorge, a ravine back of The Cliff, where a brook had eaten a trough for itself by the grindings of slow geologic eras, and now on this July afternoon invited to long siestas in the shade by the banks of it. For the walls of the ravine shut out the sun. And the brook flowed down a lengthy ledge of rock, a bed for it which had been worn into steps where

the stream descended by means of a succession of waterfalls. Here they sat themselves and talked, to the accompaniment of the waters flowing in a thin layer over a cushion of mosses.

An old road, cut probably as a passageway for cattle down to the cool waters of the brook, and now in rutted and ruinous state, led from The Gorge up into a junction with the road that mounted to the summit of The Cliff.

Miss Blake proposed that they return home by that route. The steepness of the ascent left scant energies for the mental combat wherein their strengths had found employ. And, as they climbed, a temporary truce was declared. At the summit, when the splendid view of Hillport stretched out far below them, they paused to regain their breath; and seated themselves on a fallen tree-trunk near the edge.

"There was a point you failed to note," said Janet, resuming the theme of their talk. "The Bible may be, as you say, a masterpiece of literature. But unfortunately it has become entangled in a network of doctrines; is thick-sown with controversial mines and traps. Say what you will, it cannot be separated from religion. And religion is an antiquated thing. Yes, I must believe that daddy is right. It may have had its

uses once, but now is a supernumerary. Art and science will take its place; and sociology."

Dagner clutched at that last word as a parched man at a trace of living water along the roadway. "Sociology! Yes, that is the thing that shall save us. But what is sociology? A thing of statistics, diagrams, and charts? Is it not the rather this: the science of human nature? And that means a bigger thing, a deeper thing, a more interior thing, than merely a statistical science of society. Human nature is ruled by Belief — Belief with a capital B, if you please."

"And what, Mr. Schoolmaster, is this thing you call Belief, and which you spell with a capital B?"

Dagner did not reply straightway in word. He swept his hand out over the landscape where the village and the summer homes environing it lay. "You expect me to answer you by defining belief in terms of the intellect — a set of truths held by the mind. I'm going to disappoint you. I'm going to seem now more of a hopeless mystic than ever. But hearken to me: Belief is a force in history, solidest, most real of all forces. It is a Something that moves upon the minds of a people, determining them according to Its pleasure. Call It the Time-spirit if you wish, the Zeit-geist that sways the soul of man,

differently in different ages. You shall not see it, nor hear it, nor touch it. Hands sense not the feel of it. It is imponderable to our scales and gauges. But it is a Something. Indeed, is not science telling us that the most powerful agencies are those which our five senses are too gross of perception to detect?"

She was silent. "What is happening down there in Hillport?" he continued. "I myself am not clearly aware. But I am going to tell you what I think it is that is happening. A decree has gone forth from the Time-spirit, from this Social Mind of which our little minds are but fragments and splinters, to the effect that the people of Hillport shall get together. And we are obeying that decree. You yourself have remarked the joy you have felt in this new community sense that is manifesting itself. Whence came this new, this community spirit? From some one individual? I know none such to whom so large and deep a work as this could be ascribed. It is the Spirit of the Race, in its modern unfoldings. Time was when that Spirit decreed an ecclesiastical ordering of society. And thereupon villages arose wherein the church was great and sucked the strengths of the community into itself. That was the era of the priest; and the architecture of the medieval town — a church

towering up out of a cluster of hovels — was its crystallization. Then the Spirit spoke a new decree. Straightway ecclesiasticism caught chill, fell into a decline. The community flew apart. Men became individuals. Each wrought by himself and for himself. That was the era of Protestantism. And Hillport was its visible embodiment — an array of divergent particles; infinite scattering of energies. The individual was everything, and the community nothing. And now——”

Dagner paused for her to supply the application to the new Hillport now emerging. But she held her peace. He continued: “Now, the decree that is issuing from out the Great Mind, and that is bending us to Its wishes, is for a reintegration of the scattered units — a social ordering different from either of the two that have preceded. Not Ecclesiasticism, nor Protestantism’s exaggeration of the individual, but Democracy is now the deity that is ordaining our lives. Which same is begetting a type of society that promises a grace and a force and a beauty unseen hitherto upon earth — namely, a civic organism, a fabric of strong individuals blending their strengths in community endeavours and for community ends. Methinks It a deity that is deserving of our homage. And the worship of Whose name merits an organized ritual and stated assemblings of

ourselves. For we can say no to Its decrees if we will. But to deny Its pleas is a peril to any soul. Only as Its mandates have free course within, shall it be well with us. Yes, I am a worshipper of God; and Democracy is his name. Which of us twain" — he turned a penetrative look upon her — "which of us twain is the modernist?"

"I'm afraid I feel not the pressure upon me of this Spirit, this Social Coöperator, that you say is brooding over this people and determining them for community purposes," said she. "Guess I'm just a Philistine, a materialist, dense to these subtler intangible promptings."

A sadness fell upon Dagner. Despite the splendid material triumphs which the "New Idea" movement in Hillport was achieving, the soul within him was hungry for companionship in what he felt were the deeper things. And somehow he had counted upon Janet Blake for this. He knew of the aggressive, skeptical man she had for father, but had thought to prevail upon her even against that opposition. He saw that he had failed. Never had the issue been so sharply drawn between them as it had this afternoon, and never had she come out so clearly opposite from him. Yes, he had failed.

"To change the conversation," said she, "I've been wondering for some time back if the time

might not come when a camera club could be started for the young folks. Photography has been a hobby with me for — oh, for ever so long — and gets me the more I learn about it. It would be the most fun in the world to assemble a group of young people around me and show them how to make pictures — that is, if they'd only take interest in it and give it some attention. Furthermore, now that the library department, of which I am chairman, is working so smoothly, I'm really out of a job; because Auntie Agnes runs the cart all by herself."

Dagner remarked nonchalantly that she could probably find several who would be glad to join a class of that kind. The sun now was westering, and they resumed their homeward journey; Dagner silent, or monosyllabic; Janet describing eagerly the beauties of the photographic art, and halting him every few minutes to point out effective spots of landscape or groupings of natural objects, for a camera picture.

Janet Blake carried her plan into effect.

A dark room with running water was arranged on the second floor of the clubhouse. Developer was furnished at club expense. A club camera was bought for the use of the class, the local druggist put in a stock of photographic supplies, and the interest became quickly contagious. The girls

particularly, over whom the gymnasium had not the supreme magnetism which it exercised upon the boys, found in this new avocation a fascinating hobby. Every one who entered his residence as a competitor for the twenty-five-dollar prize was solicitous to have an accurate set of photographs of his place. It was not long before cameras individually owned began to be seen in Hillport.

And then was discovered a fact of some interest, namely, that the camera habit is an educator in æsthetics. He who carries a camera and is ever looking for pictures in the landscape becomes alert for the artistic and picturesque in nature all about him. The members of the Camera Club were not long in showing a development of an art sense which Miss Blake declared had in it unbelievable promise for Hillport's growth into beauty in years to come.

It was at the suggestion of one of the members that a further step was taken — a stereopticon exhibit of the pictures that had been taken by the class. The making of lantern slides was found — after a little experimenting and some instruction by Miss Blake — to be entirely practicable. A stereopticon lighted by acetylene, and a sheet, were bought on credit, and a lantern exhibition was given in the gymnasium. It was a brand-new kind of show, because the pictures were not only

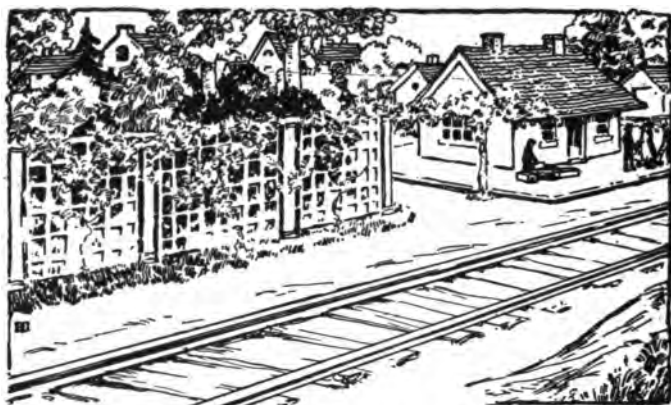
homemade: they were of home itself; the people were promised a view of Hillport as she actually was. Therefore they paid admission in goodly numbers. The city colony also turned out, many of the latter presenting green money at the door and forgetting to take any change. So that the proceeds nearly paid for the lantern investment, and the balance was made up out of the club treasury.

To say that some of the people were startled at the scenes of Hillport's dilapidation and neglect, as pictured documentarily on the sheet that night, would be writing it tepidly. And yet none of them could complain, because all of the residences, impartially, were treated. The camera is an unbiassed chronicler. People went from the exhibition with eyes opened to take the full measure thereafter of a civic eyesore when they saw it. And the Camera Club, finding itself now in possession of a stereopticon outfit, arranged public exhibitions of its views as a regular part of its programme.

Undeniably good was wrought by this move set on foot by Miss Blake. But, though Dagner saw the excellency of it, and abetted her efforts to the full, the distance that had come between them during their walk that afternoon did not disappear. They worked together whenever a



task required it. But a coldness had entered into their relationship. They took no more walks together. And Mrs. Corbin, who seemed more skilled in reading his face than others, remarked to a friend some time later that she was afraid Mr. Dagner was working too hard. For there were times, said she, when his features were drawn and tense.



CHAPTER VII



the establishment of the clubhouse for the young people, the Neighbourhood Association became accepted as a fixture in Hillport's life. It had survived for three years, something unprecedented in societies of this kind; it had recuperated from the defeat of its three School Board candidates; and now was laying deep foundations for the future by getting hold of the young and rooting in them a civic spirit. Decidedly, it was becoming an institution; it was taking on an undebatable aspect of longevity.

Therefore nearly every meeting

now saw new members received. It was felt subconsciously that this thing which Hillport was establishing was more than a town-betterment organization. In other places, village improvement societies had come, and they had gone. For they had been brought into being to accomplish some particular work; which completed, they fell apart for want of any principle of permanent cohesion. This Hillport thing was different. Quite apart from the concrete tasks at its hand, it had a reason for existence, for it was bringing to pass the reintegration of a dismembered community. It brought all the populational ingredients together; got them to know each other; broke down their insular and divisive walls; inspirited them, as Mrs. Hal Cushman put it, "to a socialistic and Tolstoyan embrace." Membership in it was more than a matter of paying dues. The signing of the constitution was made into a public and impressive rite. The signer was made to feel that he was entering a new and civic fellowship, which was to last for all time thereafter, and which was to require in him a social viewpoint instead of that ingrowing, self-loving spirit which is enemy to civic enterprises of any kind. Thus they went out after new members with almost a proselyting zeal, and the association grew in a constant and healthy fashion.

Among these newcomers, about this time, was Brandon Baric. The association rubbed its eyes with astonishment. The son of the richest woman of the colony, he had been considered, from a civic point of view, the most hopeless case in all Hillport. Not that he had been a wildling; but he had been purely a pleasure-seeker, an exquisite wrapped in a gay and ephemeral existence — to the despair of his mother, who knew what such a career would lead to when it had come to its perfect work.

Several of the men had sought him for membership. But without success. Therefore in the meeting at which he joined, they asked him what it was that had converted him. He arose in his place and made reply to their questionings.

"Converted is just the word," said he, speaking with some diffidence at the start-off, but gaining courage as he proceeded; and with the fresh, eager tones of a convert. "Yes, something has happened to me. Has got me to see things in a different light. Has made me wish to join company with you. I didn't know that the new joiners were required to relate their experience. But I don't mind telling you, now that you've asked me. This was what did the trick," and he pulled from his pocket a post card which had been torn into bits, but pasted together once more. "It will

strike you as queer. And the more I ponder it, the more queer it seems to me, too. But it reached me where I live.

"This was the way of it: I received this card one morning by mail, read it, tore it up, and threw the pieces in the road this side of the post office. Along comes young Hollenbeck, one of the kids of the village. But it seems he is a member of a Junior Civic League that has been established for the young people. It seems, too, that one of the things they emphasize in that league is community neatness. Well, he sees the torn cardboard in the road, picks up the pieces, discovers that they formed a post card addressed to me. What does he do but paste them together, and return it to me with this letter:

"Mr. Brandon Barie:

"DEAR SIR: I'm a member of the Junior Civic League. We're trying to improve the appearance of the town. You didn't know that, or you wouldn't have torn up this card and thrown it into the middle of the street. Won't you please help us after this, instead of making our work harder?

"Yours affectionately,

"JOHN HOLLENBECK."

"First along I treated the thing as a joke. The impertinence of the lad sort of amused me. I

showed the letter to my club friends in the city. Made merry over it generally. But do you know, something or other got hold of me; I can't explain it, but the more I pondered young Hollenbeck's letter the less a matter of mirth it seemed. A matter, to the contrary, that carried a serious brow. For I — why, I am supposed to be more privileged than others; child of luxury, heir to the culture of the ages. That such a person should be inferior in public spirit to one of the village boys! Decidedly it had another than a purely humorous aspect. It barbed itself into my conscience. I've written to the chap, thanking him for teaching me some civic manners. And — well, here I am to-night. And I'd be willing to make a book that the mother of that harum-scarum Brandon Barie will not be a bit displeased when he tells her to-night on reaching home that he's joined company with the Hillport Neighbourhooders, and has taken the pledge."

"Yes, that's quite what we are," remarked Mr. Hendrick, who was chairman that night; "we are the Neighbourhooders. Thank you for that word. And we will now proceed to make you a member in full regalia, by equipping you with this fistful of application blanks, for use in converting your friends."

"Willingly," replied Barie. "I'm in this thing

for keeps. In fact, 'for keeps' expresses the idea that is shaping itself inside of me concerning the nature of this organization. This looks to me to have elements of permanency which the usual board-of-trade kind of a society lacks. If Reverend Mr. Dagner over there will permit me to say it, I felt to-night when signing that constitution almost as though I was joining a church — a sort of civic church, if such a breed of thing is thinkable."

Mrs. Corbin led in the handclapping that greeted Barie's remark. "Yes," said she, "it's the religion of Democracy, as Mr. Dagner is teaching us to call it. And the real religion it is, too. All other sects are nothing but idolators, are followers after false gods. Oh, yes, you will find that we have here the intensity and intolerance that mark the true devotee."

Said Dagner: "Unless I am mistaken, there is much practical sagacity in phrasing our purpose thus, giving it an interior anchorage. Because it digs deep foundations for our work, sets before us a task of magnitude, so as to attract minds of largest dimension. The Hillport Neighbourhood Association is doing a work of infinite meaning. For it conceives its task in grander terms than merely the improvements of the outward aspect of the community. Its task is to grow a new, a

community mind in the people; and thus to breed a race of men and women in whom the communal welfare shall take precedence over private aggrandizement. One of the church elders has turned cold toward me because he says my work is not resulting in a sufficient increase in the church's membership. And I guess he is right. Not at all inconceivable that some such neighbourhood association such as this is to be the church of the future; it must increase, and the old ecclesiastical forms decrease. Even as the morning star pales from sight when the sun and the day break into vision."

Brandon Barie was true to his word. He became a propagandist. A pocketful of membership blanks reminded him constantly that he was to carry the new civic spirit to his friends. He went at it with the zeal of a convert, and found that there is nothing so confirmatory of one's own position as the attempt to reproduce it in others. But almost immediately an incident happened which was to thrust upon him a task of concrete and objective nature.

Just beyond the depot in Hillport the turnpike crossed the railroad track at grade. This had long been dangerous because a sag in the track gave a down-grade swing to trains at that point. Late one afternoon a freight train came bowling

down that incline, and hit a picnic wagon returning from a pleasure resort. Fortunately, the driver was able, by whipping his horses, to clear most of the track. But the rear of the wagon was struck, the vehicle demolished, and several of the occupants were laid up with broken bones. The Neighbourhood Association at its next meeting took in hand the matter and made Brandon Barie chairman of a committee to see what could be done.

Thereupon Brandon Barie showed the real stuff that underlay his hitherto flippant and trivial exterior. Instead of bombarding the railroad company with threats, petitions, etc., he operated on inside lines. One of his clubmates in the city was an official in the railroad company. With this man he made a luncheon appointment, put the case before him, got him active in the matter. And it was not long before workmen were regrading the track at that point. The sag was removed and the tracks made to cross the turnpike by an overhead bridge.

This triumph gave the association so inspiring an impetus that they went on to further improvements in that part of the town. Shantytown was situated just across the railroad track from Hillport village in full view from the station, and the spectacle of dilapidation which it pre-

sented to every one who entered or left the village was anything but advantageous. Therefore, after securing the privilege from the railroad company, the association built a high lattice-work fence along the front of Shantytown. The choice of the vine to grow upon this fence occasioned debate in one of the meetings of the association. Morning glory was favoured by most, because of its rapid growth, whereby it would trail itself over the lattice-work quickly, and so expedite the process. But Mrs. Hal Cushman suggested rambler rose; and pleaded for it so eloquently that she finally carried the day. A liberal use of fertilizer was made, and that very season saw a bank of greenery and flowers screening off the shanties and wash-lines and tin cans from the railroad. Furthermore, that growing foliage, bordering as it did an entire side of the depot, gave to the place during the hot summer months a refreshing vista which did much to redeem the bare and dusty aspect of the station.

Still another railroad improvement soon followed. There was a man living in Hillport named Weaver, an humble and retiring citizen. His one hobby was trees. He had been a member of the American Tree Planting Association since its founding and had tried to coöperate in extending its work in this locality, but without much

success. One piece of work in particular had been suggested by the Tree Planting Association which he had long wished to see Hillport take up — namely, that the land on each side of railroad tracks should be planted with trees.

Now, with the success that had been achieved in getting the railroad company to do things, Weaver came forward (he had joined the Neighbourhood Association among the earliest), and presented to them this suggestion. They took it up. The Hillport Association made a proposition to the railroad company that if the latter would furnish the trees — any variety it wished — the Hillport people would do the planting and take care of the trees afterward — the trees to be the property of the railroad. The company, due perhaps to the advocacy of the official whose friendship Brandon Barie had enlisted for Hillport, agreed to the proposition, and shipped a thousand young trees. White oak was the tree the company had chosen, with an eye to cross-ties in days to come. They had found that white oak lends itself to the preservative treatment, is rot-resisting, and has the quality of holding the spikes better than most other woods. This last quality was much in demand by their construction department, particularly for the curves in the track, where the strain on the spikes is severest.

"Let's do the work ourselves," suggested Cushman, when the trees had arrived. The idea took. They voted that each man in the association should give a day's work, or a day's pay to hire a substitute. The day was set. Cushman was made foreman of the gang. He laid out the work beforehand, had the places for the trees marked with stakes, and the tools all in readiness. Therefore, when the morning came, each man had his job already assigned and went to it without loss of time.

The spectacle presented by that day will long be remembered by Hillport. There were more than forty men in all — millionaires in overalls, Italian sewer diggers, village mechanics, and farmers, working side by side in the greatest good humour. Tony Rebito had had considerable experience in horticulture, and Cushman therefore appointed him foreman of the hole-digging squad. Tony took his job seriously and three times called back John Corbin, who was one of his gang, to finish one of the holes, because Corbin had skimped the dimensions. The ladies served luncheon in person at midday, and most of them remained for some time to watch the men digging holes, carrying trees, tamping in ground about the roots, and carrying water to nourish the young stalk.

"More fun than an amateur circus," remarked Brandon Barie, as he ate his sandwiches. Brandon was clothed in a misfitted blue jumper and trousers that were far too short. "Carrying water four hours at a stretch is hungrier work than I ever dreamed. Hal Cushman can boss a gang for sure. Lords and lassies, how he made me work!"

The net result of the day was a double row of white oaks along both sides of the railroad, extending from the depot in both directions clear out to the village limits. The railroad company had gone into the thing largely out of good-natured willingness to accommodate a community that was patronizing its suburban line in growing amount; but when it saw the splendid scenic effect of that double row of trees on each side its track, it discovered that it had in its right-of-way an asset of which it had been until then unconscious. It began to do some figuring. Computing the constant advance in price which it was paying for its cross-ties and construction timber, it carried that ratio on a few years more. It became frightened at the price which was indicated in three and four decades hence. Therefore, as a result of the Hillport experiment, it is rumoured now that the railroad is about to establish a forestry department, and that it is planning to set a

double row of white oak trees along its entire right-of-way.

The stress which Mr. Hendrick had put on the importance of the young, finally became so infused throughout the association that it bore fruit in time in a kindergarten. The committee of women, formed by the association to have the thing in charge, approached first the school authorities and became eloquent as they pleaded the pricelessness of those years immediately following babyhood, for giving to the child a set toward the fine and wholesome and beautiful things in life. But to the School Board the names of Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Montesorri were as empty as algebraic symbols. Thereupon the association hired a teacher with its own funds, and in a room in the second story of the Hillport clubhouse assembled the tots in a kindergarten class each morning, tuition free.

Hendrick became thereby one of the happiest men in the county, and assured the committee that they would not need to worry over the expense. His shoulders, he said, could get under an additional load. It might mean a second tour on his part each year canvassing the colony for funds, but that would make a fine excuse for calling; he was fond of social visits anyway; and so on.

However, the kindergarten had not been established a month, and the younglings had begun to come in numbers even from farmhouses on the outskirts of the village, when Hendrick's face assumed a cast of care. It seems that two of the tots returning from the school one day, had a close shave from an automobile that came tearing down on them from behind a curve in the road, and whose honk they had been too engrossed to heed. This thing repeated itself twice or thrice, until finally Hendrick's mind was made up.

At one of the meetings of the association he brought the situation to their notice and pointed a way out. Why wouldn't it be possible, he asked, to run a 'bus or carryall to collect the children each morning and return them in the afternoon? It would not only safeguard against accidents, but would assure a fuller attendance in winter and on stormy days.

The idea looked good, and was put into effect. Arrangements were made with O'Flaherty, the teamster, whereby he equipped one of his wagons with a canopy top and seats, and transported the tots to and from the school. His good-humoured ways more than once decided a fond mamma to confide her child to him on rainy days, when her feelings prompted to keep Gracie home:

"Let the little darlint come, Mrs. Onderdunk.

Sure, it's raining. But, don't you see, I've brought the ark? Snuggest thing for dryness that ever could be. No, it don't leak a drop. I painted the top meself this spring, brand new. I'm the mother hen. These are my chicks. I've got a big wing for them to snuggle under. Hurry up there, my bantam. I've got six more to gather in before that school bell rings. And just like as not Auntie Agnes will come to the school to-day with some more of those coloured pictures. And the teacher will learn you a new song, to-day: 'This is the way they sow the seed, Sow the seed, Sow the seed.' Oh, don't you laugh, Mrs. Onderdunk; I'm in a kindergarten class with these fledglings twice a day, here in this caboose. I practise them in their tunes, on the way to school, and on the way home again. That's why they're learning so rapidly. And if Gracie will hurry up, she can sit with me here on the driver's seat. I guess it's her turn to drive the horses, anyway. Do you know, I wish there'd been one of these new-contraption schools when my girl Nora was a wee tot. It would have made a great singer out of her. Because there's music in our family. Do you ever hear her play the organ in church? I don't get to church myself. Why? Well, you see, I'm up pretty early other mornings. And on Sundays I sort of like to — But they do say Nora plays

the hymn tunes A No. 1. Smart girl, that Nora. She can play most any piece, right off. Ah, there's Gracie darlint! Climb right up here, girl of me heart. Now say gid-dap to the horse. Sing it: 'This is the way the driver does, The driver does, The driver does.' By-bye, mamma. Yes, yes, I'll bring her back safe and sound, and dry as a hunk of toast."

This carryall business was a bit expensive, to be sure. It added materially to the budget Hendrick was obligated to raise. But he stood to it. And cheerily. The reason for this, his cheery acquiescence in shouldering the added burden, did not come to light at the time. But has since. And has disclosed that, in getting the community accustomed to the carryall idea, Hendrick was maturing a plan which has since proved of statesmanly proportions.

I doubt if ever a set of men had such a fund of subjects for weighty discussion, as had the "Cracker Barrel Council" about this time. These doings, which were shaking all the rest of the town, were a particular source of turmoil to these solons in Bassler's store.

One Saturday night Billy Beekman came into the store and took his way to his accustomed seat on the wood-box with most unwonted animation. It was perceived that he had some tidings to

announce. They waited for him until he had recovered his breath. An excess of adipose tissue incapacitated Beekman for violent exercise. At length he was in a calm enough state to rid him of the news that was oppressing him with its weightiness: Tony Rebito was — yes, he had seen it with his own eyes — he, Billy Beekman, would not have believed it, had he not witnessed it himself; nor would have whispered a word of it to another; for he was not one to start reports that had no foundation to them; not he. He had seen too much of the mischief that is caused by empty rumours that get going, and once started, there's no stopping them any —

"Yes, yes, Billy," said Jim Borst. "But what's this about Tony, that you were going to tell?"

"Don't interrupt him," remonstrated Van Wormer from the bread-hamper. "You must let Billy here tell things in his own way. Once you get his mind confused, he —"

"My mind ain't confused," observed Billy.

"No, of course it ain't," encouraged Jim. "And now, what you were saying about Tony?"

"Well, Tony Rebito is singin' in the church choir, that's what he is. I saw him goin' into choir-practice to-night. Met him plumb in the face, as I was a-comin' from home."

A Dago singing in the church choir! The men

looked each other in the face, staring for some time silently. Could it be true? Would Parson Dagner so forget himself, and the dignity of his office, and the time-honoured precedent of the christian church, as to permit a sacrilege like that? No. They'd wait and have it confirmed, before pronouncing an opinion.

Sure enough, Sunday morning saw Rebito up in the choir loft back of the pulpit, and joining heartily in the hymns and anthems. The news quickly spread to the "Cracker Barrels" — they got their reports of church doings at second hand, because they usually took Sunday mornings to rest at home, after their lengthy discussions at the store late into Saturday night. Van Wormer met Tony a day or two later, and taxed him openly with deserting his faith to curry favour.

"You're a papist. That's what you are. Why don't you stick to your beads and other stuff?"

Rebito was for passing on in silent dignity, refusing explanations. Van Wormer mollified his tones a bit, whereat the other consented to talk:

"You no-a-understand, Meester Van Wormer. Those beads stuff, they-a no account with me, no-a more than with you. Back in Italia, same-a thing. My old man, he no go-a to church. I no-a go either. No believe-a. But like singing

vera much. Museek, ah! Meester Dagner come see me in Shantytown. One time, three time. I sing-a for him. He say, 'Come-a, sing-a to my church like-a that?' I say, 'No.' He-a say, 'Yes.' I come. Why not? Huh! I like-a Meester Dagner. I like-a the church. Dagomen like-a his kind of church. Shantytown need-a the church. You need-a the church. I, everabody need-a the church. Big-a building. Much-a room for all. Much-a the glad see-a you there when Sunday come. Adio!"

Van Wormer stood glued to his tracks and watched Tony depart, in blank amazement: "Inviting me to the sanctuary! 'Much-a the glad see-a you there when Sunday come. Adio.' Well, if that ain't the darnedest!"

Why, the "Cracker Barrels" became so engaged in discussing this Tony episode, and the kindred events transpiring, that they forgot to take their usual potion of patent medicine; and Bassler's sale of that article appreciably fell off.

"Yes, and glad of it," remarked Bassler, when some one asked him if it were true that he was not selling so much patent medicine as formerly. "Whiskey and dope — that's all the stuff is. The simpletons are drugged; and so get the notion it helps them. Billy here says he has to take it to keep down his rheumatism. Hasn't got rheu-

matism any more than I have. If they didn't keep so everlastingly doped up on this stuff they might have some snap in them to go to work. And then they'd pay the store debts they owe me. Why, do you know, I'm carrying a good share of the people on my books two, three, yes, some of them six months. I've watched, and have come to notice that the people who buy the most bottles of patent medicine are generally the slowest in paying their bills. I wouldn't sell another bottle of the stuff if the other storekeepers hereabouts would also agree to blacklist it."

Whatever the explanation, the fact was as Bassler stated, in regard to Billy and the cronies. They consumed, now, less of the "Guaranteed Cure for all Ailments of Liver, Kidneys, Nerves, and the Digestive and Respiratory Tracts." Perhaps their thoughts were in so active ferment over the astonishing things happening in Hillport that they had no leisure to brood over their aches and diseases. Or perhaps the mental excitement which was in the air gave them the stir and wholesome tumult which nerves crave, so that they needed not the stimulus in bottled form. But sure it is, the "Specifics" on Bassler's shelf were less popular than he had known to be the case since the memory of him had begun.

The awarding of the twenty-five-dollar prize

for residence improvement proved a particularly fertile theme to these "Cracker Barrels." Indeed the whole village was excited. Twenty-five dollars in a lump sum was no small amount in a village where ready cash was not a frequent phenomenon. Then, too, the competitive nature of the thing, and the publicity feature of it, enlisted the interest of some to whom the money award was the lesser consideration. To stimulate attention the more, the Neighbourhood Association to whom the ordering of the affair had been entrusted, had secured from the bank five and twenty crisp new dollar bills and suspended them from a string in Bassler's window (during the daylight hours, when the clerk could keep an eye in that direction), with a card explaining that these were to go to the winner. That row of steel engravings proved the most fascinating art exhibit the town had seen in many a day. And to the "Cracker Barrels" most fascinating of all.

The association had adopted the method of a village referendum in awarding the prize. To every householder a printed ballot was mailed, with a printed explanation. It so happened that one of the houses competing for the prize was that of Tom Borst, a nephew of Jim Borst who held sway nightly from his post on the counter beside Bassler's coffee grinder. Therefore, the "Cracker

Barrels," out of group loyalty, espoused Tom's cause and sought votes for him throughout the town. They would stop people in the street, to call attention to the way Tom Borst's residence was sprucing up: "Have you noticed the coat of paint Tom has put on to his house lately?" Or, "I see that the old rickety fence around Tom Borst's place has come down, and Tom is grading up his lawn. It seems to me it's a fine piece of work Tom is doing there; don't you think so? For my part, I never did see a place ginger up as his has in these few months." And so forth.

In fact, this Bassler store conclave took the thing so to heart that they made it after a while almost a personal matter. When finally, after three months of this canvassing, the votes were cast and it was seen that the prize had been awarded to another, Jim Borst and his cronies were mad.

"It's enough to get anybody net up," exclaimed one of them, Hammy Van Dyke. "Why, Tom Borst earned that there prize plain as the nose on your face. It's a crooked deal he got, mark my word. I'm a-thinkin' some o' them city folk stuffed the ballot." Indeed, the feeling throughout the entire town ran so high that the association had to decide that thereafter the awarding of the prize should be by a

committee of judges appointed for that purpose. This last put the capstone to the turbulent feelings of the "Cracker Barrel" group. They said the change had been made and the balloting taken out of the hands of the people, to the end that the city folk could run the thing with a high hand and show favouritism without let or hindrance. One night from his seat beside the coffee grinder, Jim Borst suggested to his cronies a plan that he had carefully matured. He stated that in his opinion the Hillport Neighbourhood Association had become a dictatorial institution, because the bosses there had nobody on the inside to oppose them. Therefore, the scheme which he had thought out, and which he proceeded to lay before them.

Apparently, his suggestion tickled them immensely, and for the next few nights their discussions and confabs took on an unwonted animation. It was a piece of more than common strategy they were devising, as was indicated by the secrecy they maintained. Not until the next meeting of the Hillport Association did their maneuverings come to light. At that meeting Jim Borst and his following presented themselves in a body for membership.

"We're going to pay dues, same as the rest, and have a vote in this here thing," explained

Jim. "We want to see a square deal; that's what we've come for."

Their applications were accepted. They signed the constitution, and the "Cracker Barrel Council" became members in full standing in the Hillport Neighbourhood Association.



CHAPTER VIII



Van Wormer and the rest of the "Cracker Barrel" cronies had now joined the Hillport Neighbourhood Association, by no manner of means signified that their opposition to "being bossed by them city folks" had become defunct. Contentiousness — "damned cantankerousness" is what Hal Cushman called it — was deep laid in the fibres of them, and had become, by the ingrowing quality that seems to attach to village life when untempered by outside contacts, an inveterate thing. Now the field of battle had shifted, that was all. Instead of sitting on the counter in Bassler's

store and labouring it vigorously with Bert Re Qua the clerk, who had become an ardent devotee of the "New Idea" movement, the "Cracker Barrel Council" now attended the meetings of the association and there mightily waged combat.

The twenty-five-dollar prize for residence betterment was the first bone to cause a fight. Bill Van Wormer, anyway, was looking for trouble. He had recently been placed on the School Board by Pete Mattice, the town boss — as a reward for services as political henchman, if the truth must be told — and felt an importance which was keen to display itself. At the meeting of the association where the three judges to award the prize were to be elected, "Bill" found his opportunity. Two of the three names proposed were of the "city colony" folk. "Proved just what he and others had been saying for a long time," exclaimed Bill in a vehement speech — "namely, this Neighbourhood Association was nothing else than a scheme for the city people to run the town." And he nominated three villagers. Hal Cushman showed fight and spoke for the "colony" ticket. The result was that two of the "village" ticket were chosen, and only one from the "colony."

"Bill" chuckled audibly when, at the end of that season, these judges awarded the prize to a

villager, Widow Hollenbeck. She lived alone with her boy Johnnie, at the far end of "Cat Alley," as the lane was called, in a run-down single-story house that really was not much to talk about even after it had won the prize. "But the improvement, the improvement that it has showed!" Bill insisted, in championing her claim; "and the prize must go to the house that shows most progress, not most beauty."

His argument was incontrovertible. Johnnie Hollenbeck was a wide-awake lad who had some time before joined the Hillport Junior League and who had caught the "New Idea" contagion hard. He was the chap who had picked up that torn postal card and, by returning it to Brandon Barie, had been the means of awakening that latter to nascent civic consciousness. Johnnie went home from the league meetings, and got his mother's permission to fix up their humble home. With a supply of nails gathered from the fire ruins of a barn near by, he nailed on the loose pickets of the dooryard fence; he did the same with the wind-loosened clapboards on the barn; he smoothed off the yard, and planted it with some rose bushes; and he trailed a clambering rose over the front porch, covering up the dilapidated posts and the cornice where brackets were broken or wanting. Yes, he had fairly earned the prize. And there-

upon, with a business head unsuspected in him, he put the twenty-five dollars in the bank as capital wherewith to make still more improvements the next year and so win the prize again.

It was through the "Garden Club," as they called it, that Johnnie obtained the great fine roses that had done so much to help him in the prize for a residence in other respects quite hopeless. This Garden Club was an informal group of householders organized to get their dooryard supplies cheap. By pooling their orders for roots, plants, bulbs, and trees, they secured wholesale rates, and found such substantial economies therein that they extended the system to their purchase of garden utensils, fertilizer, etc. Moreover, the informal gatherings of this group to transact the business details were found to be pleasantly stimulating, and also informative because of the interchange of ideas and experiences.

Another fight between Van Wormer's crowd and the city folk, which promised for a time to assume serious proportions, was over the Fourth of July celebration. It happened at a meeting held in John Corbin's house. Bill, in high feather because of his victory in the matter of the "residence betterment" judges, got up when "new business" was announced, and moved that Hillport get busy for a smashing big "Fourth of July." It

had been a long time, he said, since the town had had a real Fourth like the kind they used to have when he was a boy. And he didn't see why the good old practice couldn't be brought back. "Let's buy a ton of gunpowder, make a noise, and set tar-barrels on fire, to show the country once more that Hillport is on the map."

Mr. Hendrick got up and spoke against it. Not exactly against it, either, but pointed out the difficulties. He was a member, he said, of the American Peace Society, and couldn't conscientiously work to revive old militarist feuds and furies. Besides, it seemed impossible any longer to celebrate the Fourth in fit fashion, because of the hoodlumism into which invariably it degenerated, as well as the danger from firearms; also the proved peril to children from firecrackers and from even the innocent-seeming toy pistol.

This fired Bill into flame. He jumped to his feet and said it was just what he had expected. The city swells were hot for any improvements that would raise real-estate values and make more automobile roads and bridle paths. But when it was a project to get a day's pleasure for the people, they always up and squelched it. Jim Borst followed in the same strain. "Time was," said he, "when on a Fourth of July Hillport could make the eagle scream so as to be heard all over

the county; but now the only sign that a Fourth was come, was a peanut stand in front of the post office, with a red-white-and-blue bunting over the top, and not even a roman candle to make the night glorious."

In that last plaint, the knowing could have traced a piteous personal grievance, for Jim was a master hand at managing a fireworks display. In the old days that part of the celebration always fell to him. He would collect the money for the fireworks; and then, down by the millpond when dusk was come, on the opposite bank from where the people were gathered, he would superintend in person and with infinite zest the lighting of the rockets and the conflagrations of red fire. The decay of the custom had left a void in his heart; wherefore his angry interrogation on this meeting night: "Why don't Hillport have spunk enough once more to make the eagle scream? As to the youngsters, what harm if they do shoot off a few guns? Let 'em have a good racketty time at least one day in the year. See how their Junior Civic League is helping the town; the grown-ups ought to do something for them in return."

In that last reference, Jim made a ten-strike. For the Junior League had completed a piece of work of which all the town was talking. Hillport

had never known such a thing as refuse receptacles. From which it resulted that the roadways, particularly in front of stores and public places, were constantly littered with papers, fruit skins, and peanut shells. The league at one of its meetings voted to take the matter in hand. They raised money by means of a tag day — the orange-coloured tags of pasteboard had on them the picture of a man slipping on a banana peel, and cost everybody ten cents each — and bought three durable and artistic refuse cans with lids. One of these was placed in front of the post office, one by the depot, and the other out in the street in front of the schoolhouse. On the lid of each was painted, "Presented by the Junior Civic League, for a Cleaner Hillport."

Therefore, when Jim now mentioned the youngsters, he made friends at once for the celebration idea. Hendrick arose. He said he had not meant to be understood as opposing the idea, if only it could be done right. Holidays properly celebrated, so as to bring out their real meaning, were splendid things. It was the dangerous and distasteful military emphasis in the day that he objected to. But a fine and fit Fourth, why —

Bill was on his feet, quick to seize the favourable moment. A "Fine and Fit Fourth!" Just precisely the name for it! No need of lugging in

the soldier idea if anybody objected to it. They could have speeches and such like.

"Yes, and fireworks," put in Jim. "There's no finer way to make the eagle scream than to shoot rockets that will blaze a trail of glory across the midnight heavens and make the stars in their courses look pale with envy."

But Hendrick evidently had a matter still weighing on his mind. "It's all right," said he, "to propose a programme in which dignified speeches shall have a part. To carry the thing to performance is another thing. America's Fourth has drifted so far away from any idea of seriousness and civic import that the average Independence Day oration is the sorriest affair ever, and is usually attended by none save the committee of arrangements. Now if, for instance, the graduating exercises of the public school only came a week later, so as to get the school and the Fourth to keep company together in some practical way ——"

Bill couldn't wait for him to finish. He informed the assembly that he was a member of the Public School Board in the town of Hillport. As such it was his pleasure and bounden duty to introduce measures at any time that had for their purpose the betterment of the cause of education. And he for one didn't see why Mr. Hendrick's

suggestion might not be a good one. They could have the graduating exercises of the school postponed and held on Fourth of July eve. Make it a rousingly patriotic affair. Put all of the literary part of the Fourth's celebration into that, and then give the next day to sports and jollification. This would have the added advantage, now that he thought of it, that a number of the old graduates of the school always came out from the city to spend the Fourth in their native town, and this would permit them to be present at the school commencement.

Hendrick was on his feet instanter. "Bill Van Wormer," said he, "if you'll put that plan through, I'll serve on a committee of arrangements for an Independence Day celebration, and we'll make it the grandest affair Hillport ever witnessed."

The contagiousness caught like fire in a forest. Then and there a committee of ten, for a "Fine and Fit Fourth," was created. Van Wormer was chairman, and Hendrick was "executive secretary." Maybe Bill wasn't proud to have carried the day, and to have been selected chairman of the committee! The amount of publicity he gave to the thing, from the moment the meeting adjourned that night, would have done credit to the most enthusiastic press agent. To be sure, he



proved a better talker than doer; but, then, the committee had an "executive secretary" for the actual business of arrangements.

In the matter of changing the date of the school commencement, however, Bill actually made good. He got his School Board to vote to hold it the night of July 3d. True, this was not a very dangerous change, because the commencement exercises were but half-hearted affairs at best. Most of the town didn't know there was such a thing as school commencement, and would have consented to change it to any date whatsoever.

When Hendrick heard of Bill's success, he was jubilant. For a long time back he had been wondering why, in village schools at least, the commencement exercises and the celebration of the Fourth might not be induced to form a partnership, and so both be rescued from their present sterility. School commencement thereby would receive Independence Day's civic note, and so be broadened out of its present tendency to an academic aloofness from the rest of the community. Independence Day, on the other hand, would gain from that alliance the literary touch of the school which would restrain the rowdiness and lift it always into a thing of meaning and dignity.

Therefore Hendrick laid himself out to make the experiment a success. Thanks to the early start — for they had two full months before July — he set about to arrange for the night of July 3d in constructive fashion. He knew from long experience that music, and especially chorus singing, is a popular attraction of the first magnitude. He decided that it should be singing by the children themselves. So he sent in to the city and secured a trained leader to come out and devote all of each Friday afternoon at the school-house training the school in patriotic songs.

Also, in the name of the Fourth of July committee, he offered a prize of sets of American History for the best oration from the boy graduates, and for the best essay from the girl graduates. Further still, he had a rich and tasteful certificate made, a copy of which, he announced, would be presented on the night of July 3d to every scholar who would learn the United States Constitution. These local arrangements he followed up by getting an announcement sent to every graduate of the school who had moved away from the town, inviting all alumni back to Hillport to spend the Fourth this year, and to be present at commencement exercises the evening before.

The rest of the Committee of Ten also had details assigned to them, and were busy. Jim

Borst, one of the ten, was given charge of the fireworks. For some weeks he was observed to be in a puzzled and dejected mood. The ruin of the old dam across Vleetskill Creek had turned the millpond now into little other than a mudhole. So where could he display the fireworks? He mentioned his troubles, at one of the meetings of the association. Brandon Barie, who was present, was seen to speak to his mother; and at the close of the meeting to approach Jim. What he said was not disclosed at the time. But from that moment Jim brightened up as by some potent elixir, and went circulating a subscription paper with such a magnetism of energy that, of the seven hundred dollars raised by the finance committee for the entire celebration, more than three hundred of it was turned in by Jim's paper alone; and that amount was turned back to him for fireworks expenditure.

At length came the night of July 3d. The school hall was packed, as had never been known for commencement exercises before. Graduates, come out from the city to spend the Fourth, were present now at the school affair, some for the first time in years. Also, the exercises on this night were given now a popular appeal, enlisting the interest and attendance of Hillport people whom

the schoolhouse in its narrower function had never attracted. And the programme reflected the change. The prizes to the boy and girl participants put them on their mettle, and penetrated a spirit of tenseness and expectancy throughout the evening. Fourteen of the school children had passed the examination held that afternoon in the school, having recited the Constitution by heart. Therefore, at a place in the evening's programme, these were summoned to the stage, and formally presented by Hendrick with the certificates engraved on heavy paper suitable for framing. And the singing! The choral work displayed by the children that night was a revelation of the musical possibilities that lie in the American temperament, once those powers are drawn forth and trained.

"Did you ever realize that there was such a heap sight of music in 'Star-Spangled Banner?'" exclaimed Van Wormer from his seat on the platform, to John Corbin at his side.

"Best chorus work in all my born days," commented Corbin. "The sight of O'Flaherty down there with his daughter Nora, and joining in the singing at the top of his strength, almost tempts me into it, too." And O'Flaherty sure was enjoying it. Since he had been given the job of carting the kindergarten tots, he felt himself

a public functionary, and demeaned himself ever more expansively.

"Yes, and look over yonder," whispered Van Wormer. "If there isn't that Dago Tony, all dressed up fit to kill, and singing as if he were the only person in the game. They're a forward set, those Eyetalians. I never could see much use in them. But if he can sing the 'Star-Spangled Banner,' I guess a freeborn American has a right also." And he broke in lustily on the last verse — a measurably creditable performance, slightly marred by the fact that he didn't know a word of it, and could only hum it through his nose, his mouth tightly shut.

The next morning, the Fourth, saw a baseball match between a team of graduates of the public school and a team of the undergraduates. The prize was a cup donated by the Hillport Neighbourhood Association, to be engraved with the names of the winning team, and to be a permanent trophy for a similar event each year thereafter. The youngsters won, 7 to 4; and a corking game it was, too.

The afternoon was given over to a general community frolic at the bathing beach. Parents came with their children; families went in bathing together, with Captain Paul in his glory as caretaker. There were medals for the winners in

competitive sports, Mat Wood, the Y. M. C. A. assistant at the clubhouse, being the official in charge. After the swimming races came a tub race and sculling races; then contests of running and jumping.

The obstacle race, with barrels to be wiggled through, was particularly diverting to the youngsters. Portly Will Beekman, whom the prize of a collie pup had tempted into this race against his better judgment, got stuck in one of the barrels and dug the earth so frantically in his efforts to get out that George Vroman, who, as one of the elders of the church, had looked but sourly upon the whole affair, was overtaken by a fit of laughter and had his facial lines loosened up for all the rest of the day.

"I wouldn't mind it if I had only won the pup," observed Beekman, regarding gloomily his dilapidated wearing apparel when they had finally pulled him out. "I wonder who put the nails in that barrel."

Some one answered him that there weren't any nails in the barrels.

"Yes, there were nails, too. You can't tell me. Guess I know. I can get through any barrel that was ever made, provided there ain't no nails sticking out. I'll bet somebody did it on purpose, so I wouldn't get the pup."

About five o'clock a trumpet sounded, and Hal Cushman, as herald, announced through a megaphone that the entire community was invited by Mrs. Barie and Brandon Barie to be guests for that evening down at their villa on the bay. Thither the throng now turned itself and, some afoot and some by water, made their way to the Barie villa. There they were received by the hostess and host. Simple refreshments were served, quantity of eatables rather than sumptuousness being the note. Sandwiches were handed out by the basketful; bananas were brought out by the bunch; there were several churns full of lemonade, and four empty sugar barrels heaping full of fresh buttered popcorn.

After the supper came a feature of the programme which illustrates the unexpected range of ability latent even in a sleepy rural town, if it can once be brought out. Fred Fink, a man who had come out from the city to Hillport some years before, was a bachelor boarding in the village — a mild and unregarded fellow. But when Fourth of July began to be noised, it was discovered that he had one hobby in the world. And that was, paper balloons. He got a group of the boys over at their club around him, and together they made up a supply of balloons, he furnishing the directions and the tissue paper and other supplies.

For six weeks previous they had been at work. And now, after the refreshments, and in the day's decline, a space on the lawn was cleared, and the balloons were sent up. They were of wondrous shape and hue — elephants, bears, pumpkins, all went sailing aloft, to remain a shining portent in the heavens. As soon as it was dark, fireworks, with Jim Borst in charge, followed. With a finale piece, wherein the fire-letters, "Hillport Neighbourhood Association," encircled a pair of clasped hands, the Fine and Fit Fourth came to an end, automobiles being pressed into service to take home the women and babies, and the aged.

"Say, them aerial bombs weren't at all bad, eh?" Jim Borst was heard to remark to a neighbour on the way home that night. "And did you notice how I mixed up the roman candles and the pinwheels? That's the way to get the best effect. The clasped hands for that set piece was also my idea, too. I got it up myself, to indicate that we're all neighbourhooders here. If Hillport hasn't made the eagle scream to-day, then I don't know."



CHAPTER IX



TELLING of the "Hillport Farm Products Company," an adventure in coöperative marketing, I should state at the outset that, unlike most of the doings that have been reported in these chapters, this one was not originated by the Neighbourhood Association. It was started by Pete Mattice as an offset to the growing power of the association. Though Pete as political boss of Hillport had won that School Board election, the triumph, contrary to his exultant prediction, had not sawed the whippletree of "that 'air New Idea crowd." As matter of fact, it had spurred the

"New Idea-ers" to more energetic endeavours, and with such amazing results that Pete saw his hold on the town materially jeopardized. Therefore, perceiving that reform was becoming popular, he decided to become a "reformer," too.

For a long time the farmers and gardeners round about Hillport had been disgruntled at the treatment they received from the commission men in the city. Newspapers were full of talk about high prices, but the Hillport growers saw very little of it coming their way. As Al Becker, whose farm was across the Vleetskill Creek, put it, "From this here hullabaloo about high cost of living, people would think we farmers were rolling in chariots. But so far as I can see, it's only the middlemen who are rolling around in chariots. Leastwise, their automobiles look to me pretty much like that sort of a rig."

Pete Mattice was talking with this Becker one day in front of the post office, while they were waiting for the mail to be distributed. "Yes, Al," said he, "you growers make a holler because you sell your turnips at 40 cents a bushel, and the grocer in the city resells 'em for 40 cents a peck. And the consumer is hollerin' just as loud as you be. The middleman has you both — gets you going and coming. Now, if you'd put yourselves in my hands, I'd bring you two together, and

between you, you'd squash that middle sucker flat as a pancake."

"How could you do it, Pete?"

"How? This way: I'd pool all of you growers here into a marketing association. I'd be president of it; that is, if you wanted me to — anything to help Hillport, has always been my policy. We'd hire a man to get orders direct from the city people in their homes, and ship the produce to them direct — straight as a line fence, mark you; no more of this roundabout, zigzag sort of marketing."

"But in that case we farmers would have to pull together. Which couldn't be. You see, Pete, we've sort of been trained to go it alone, each by himself. We're an independent lot, we farmers are. We don't lean on one another for support, like the way they stack hop-poles. We're rooted, each for himself; we're trees that stand up against the storm, individuals."

"Yes, and that is just what is playing the devil with you. You fellows are too all fired individual. E Pluribus Unum — did you ever work your brains and ask what them curious words on this here half-dollar piece mean? 'One out of many,' that's what that motto there in the eagle's mouth means. In union there is strength. Once upon a time, Al, a man was dying, and he called his sons

around his bedside (the story is found in the Bible, I think it is; but seeing as you don't know the Bible, I'll have to tell it to you). And this man caused to be brought to him a bundle of sticks, firmly tied together. He handed this bundle to his sons and bade them break it. But though they tried, one after the other, they failed. Then he caused the bundle to be broken apart, and the separated sticks to be handed to his sons. And now they were able to break the sticks easily. That's just the way it is with you chaps. Hillport, the common mother. And all of you farmers are her children. And if you only had sense enough to pool your interests, no one could master you. But you fall apart into a hundred separate units. And then your common enemy, the middleman in the city, breaks you one by one, like as though you were toothpicks."

"I don't know but what there's something in what you say, Pete."

"Of course there's something in what I say. Get together! that's the motto for to-day. I don't know how or why; but it's almost as though there was something in the very air, telling us mortal fools to stop cut-throating each other and work harmoniously. Look at the trusts. Some pin-headed politicians think they can stop the trusts. You can't no more stop the trusts than

you can stop the aurora borealis. The trusts are hearkening to this Big Voice that's telling us to clasp hands instead of using our paws everlastingly to finger the other fellow's windpipe."

"Yes. But now your argument don't hold water any more. The manufacturers of steel can get together, because they are close to each other in their product and ways of working."

"And it's prezactly the same with you farmers," insisted Pete. "You all are creating one and the same product under one and the same set of conditions, and for one and the same market. Therefore, the economies and efficiencies that have been demonstrated to result from coöperation, say in the steel industry, would result equally from coöperation in the potato industry. Whether it's pigs or pig iron, the principle is the same."

"Why, go ahead, go ahead with your scheme, Pete. You can count me in, for one. I guess you couldn't by any amount of blunderbussing make conditions worse than they are now. Anything would be better than 40-cent turnips."

So Pete got busy. He had a letter struck off, announcing a meeting in the schoolhouse to discuss a coöperative association, and sent it to all growers in the vicinity. Meanwhile he drummed it up personally. Some forty turned out. The "Hillport Farm Products Company" was for-

mally launched, Peter A. Mattice president. An entrance fee of \$5 was exacted. With the proceeds of the dues paid in, they started operations. For manager they secured for part of his time Bert Re Qua, the clerk at Bassler's store; Bassler consenting because it made his place the headquarters of the thing, and would draw business. This Bert was a brisk young chap. He sang bass in Dagner's choir and was as full of push — to quote Pete's putting of it — "as a chick in a shell."

The first thing was to get customers; and here young Bert showed the stuff that was in him. Without letting Pete Mattice know — for Pete would have put his foot down against any help from "that colony set" — he talked over the thing with Cushman, Hendrick, Mr. and Mrs. Corbin, and others of the commuter folk. Through these he got a latest copy of the city's Society Blue Book. Selecting a list of addresses therein, he sent to them a neatly typewritten letter announcing the Hillport Farm Products Company, "A Bee Line from Producer to Consumer," and added that the manager would shortly call in person to explain. Meanwhile a trial order was solicited, and a return post card was inclosed, with prices printed on the back in the shape of an order blank.

The returns were immediate. For one thing,

the letterhead, at Mrs. Corbin's suggestion, was an artistic piece of printerwork — envelope and paper to match, and with a distinctiveness of shape and tint about it as far removed as possible from a grocer's stationery. "There must be tone to the Coöperative," she had advised, "Tone is a marketable commodity, particularly with the class of patrons that you are after." Also, the prices quoted were a business-getter. They ranged a full 20 per cent. under the market, "carriage prepaid." "Better give even a ruinous rate first along," Cushman had counselled; "anything to get a first order; after that, you can get your prices back to a business basis." The motto, "One Day from Grower to Eater," was also a coaxer, and a number of orders came in for butter, eggs, and "prime vegetables."

Bert had anticipated these by arranging with a woodworking mill in a neighbouring town to make a quantity of small shipping boxes. They were of whitewood, because of its purity of tint and lightness of weight. They were tidily gotten up; for Mrs. Corbin had impressed upon him the importance of tastefulness of appearance extending to every detail of the business. On the cover was stamped the name of the company, and the head of a handsome, healthy cow. Thus, before the Coöperative had been in business a week, little

whitewood boxes, inclosing butter prints, home-made cheeses, and eggs in cardboard, left Hillport by parcels post and express, to reach the city consumer the next afternoon.

The bustling manager followed this up with a trip to the city and a personal call on the names written to. To the housewife — to the housekeeper, where the head of the home could not be reached — he explained the mutual advantages of coöperative marketing. Time was, said he, when the middleman was a necessary evil, but the development of transportation facilities had now made his elimination to a large degree possible. He also dropped a hint of the cold storage invasion, with its detriment of quality and danger to health. And he hung on until he had received at least a trial order in nearly every house visited.

The farmers in the Coöperative brought their produce in to Bert at Bassler's store as nearly as possible each day. This point was emphasized, because the freshness of the article delivered would be a prime factor in holding the trade. Neatness was another property upon which stress was laid; so much so that a deal of grumbling was heard at first. For instance, there was good Mrs. Updike. She brought in a basket of eggs, some of which were soiled. Bert told her that he would have to wash off every discoloured egg before

shipping it, and asked her to do the cleaning thereafter. "What! My eggs ain't fancy enough for your tastes? What has the shell got to do with an egg, I'd like to know. It's the inside that most people eat. And every egg in that basket was laid since sun-up three days since."

"Now just glance your eye here, Mrs. Updike," said Bert. They were in the rear of the store, and he was packing some of the boxes, to ship. "Do you see this oak leaf I lay so artistically into each box, on top? What do you suppose that's for? Oak leaves aren't good to eat. And so maybe you'd think it was a softheaded piece of business. But I tell you it isn't. Can't you see how the rich green on top of that pair of dressed chickens makes them look nice and fresh? Every box that goes out from this company of ours has one of these oak leaves inside. It gets to be a kind of trademark. It gives tone, that's what it gives. And that's a mighty important thing, I tell you."

"Tone?" she remarked, halfway between scorn and interrogation.

"Mrs. Updike, you mean to tell me you have lived in this world over thirty years (she was 46, but Bert's experience as store clerk had not gone for nothing) and don't know what tone is. Why, tone is what gives — it's that indefinable some-

thing which makes — well, you might call it that peculiar quality which lifts a thing into — Oh, I can't stop to explain it now. But every last thing this firm ships has got to be classy; that's all there is to it."

Mrs. Updike was only half convinced. And she went around telling her farm neighbours that if this Coöperative was going to be so pernicketty, she didn't know as her stuff would be tony enough for them. None the less, the eggs she brought the next time were so clean that they glistened. Furthermore, the over-particular Bert must have been right as to the business-pulling powers of "tone," because nearly all of the first customers repeated their orders. Some, too, must have told the neighbours on their street, for letters of inquiry began to arrive. And it was not long before a list of regular patrons had been secured. Bills were payable monthly. From the start the company adopted a firm credit policy: "Terms, net cash." Insistence upon this angered some of the customers, and lost a few, but it won the day. And the first year of the Coöperative closed without a debt. Without a surplus, too, for that matter. But considering the expenses incident to the initial stages of such a movement, this showing was regarded as highly auspicious.

A forward step was taken the next year. It

was found that the customers were desirous of getting all of their country supplies from the Hillport company. This, not merely because they were pleased with the Hillport brand, but also to save the trouble of dealing with more than one firm. But some produce, such as potatoes, apples, and the bulkier vegetables can be handled most advantageously by freight, whereas the company thus far had dealt only in parcels that could be shipped by post or express. Moreover, it was found that the hotel trade also could be reached, provided a method of transportation in wholesale lots could be devised. Therefore a basement in the city, alongside the railroad freight-yard, was rented, and arrangements were made with a trucking firm there to deliver the goods as per directions from the Hillport office. This extension quickly justified itself. It permitted the bulkier produce, wherein freshness is not a prime consideration, to be shipped in car-load lots. The saving in prices effected was so material that orders soon poured in with a copiousness that Hillport's immediate vicinity could not fill; and growers, some from as far as eight miles away, began to team their produce to the Hillport Farm Products Company.

At one of the meetings of the board of directors, Bert put up to them a plan which he had been

maturing for some time. Namely, the purchase of an automobile truck, whereby they could cart their produce into the city themselves and thus be independent of the express and freight lines. As matter of fact, it was a bluff whereby to coerce the express company and railroad into offering better facilities. But it would never have done to explain this point in an open meeting. Bert, however, had taken President Mattice into his scheme and had secured his support.

"It's this way, Pete," Bert had explained to him; "here I've been pestering Will Zeh, the express agent, for ten months and more, to give us better rates. And what has it amounted to? All he answers me is that he has forwarded my memorandum in to the company, and that they answer with a veto: 'Rates now being offered are as low as a sound business policy will permit' — all that sort of thing. Same way, too, with Hill, the freight agent. He'd like to put in an extra switch for our private use, and give us empty cars more promptly. But he says the men higher up refuse to listen to him."

"Well, and what can we do about it? Bertie, my boy, they've got us by the scrooch of the neck. We can put up a holler. That's good policy. And then twiddle our thumbs and make the best of it."

"No, siree, Pete, they haven't got us by the scrooch of the neck; not by a long shot. They've got to be scared, that's what they need. And we can do it, too. I've put an ad in the city paper, and have got track of an auto truck that's for sale cheap. We can get it on two weeks' approval. And ——"

"Go it, boy, go it!" exclaimed Pete, clapping a hearty hand on his shoulder. "Never say die. You're a brick. A man after my own heart. Go it!" And he did. With Pete's help the motion was put through the directors' meeting. And the truck was bought on two-weeks' approval.

Meanwhile Bert had been conducting a publicity campaign of no mean proportions. He got in touch with Van Gosbeck, editor of the Hillport *Weekly Globe*, and gave him a story which came out under two-column headlines, front page, leaded, announcing the action of the directors, and hinting that the Farm Products Company, by this innovation of an auto truck, was opening up a new and perhaps valuable means of communication with the city; because the company would in all probability not stop with the one truck, to handle its own business, but would add more of the vehicles and open up a profitable freight and express route, for the accommodation of the public at large. These trucks would not be content with

carrying produce one way and returning empty. By no means. They would bring back from the city rich loads of freight, and thus lower the cost of manufactured products for every consumer in Hillport.

Bert took pains to place a copy of the paper in the hands of both the local express and freight agents, with a melancholy shake of the head as accompaniment: "Sorry, old man, but your policy forced us to it. You see, we have to compete with shippers in localities where the transportation companies are broad-gauged in their policy of building up local industries. Why, you would have driven us to the wall, if we had let you have your own way."

Before the two weeks had expired results were obtained. A letter arrived from the head office of the express company announcing the pleasure the company experienced in being able to present to the Hillport Coöperative a new rate schedule which — in short, a reduction which averaged, taking all of the items, a full 15 per cent. And the railroad company sent a man out in person to ascertain what they could do to further the admirable business which the Hillport Farm Products Concern was establishing. Oh, he was more than courteous, was this envoy from the railroad president's office; cigars of the best, and an urgent

request that the Coöperative's officials look him up whenever they were in the city. Their request for an extra siding, said he, had long been under consideration; it had at last been reached, in the official routine; and — he was most happy to state — had been acted upon favourably. Also, arrangements had been entered into whereby "empties" could be supplied to Hillport more promptly than hitherto. And he hinted also that a sweeping rate reduction was under consideration. Bert accepted the cigars he offered, took him home for dinner, and the negotiations were completed.

Thereupon, what to do with the auto truck? Already, in the lower rate schedules secured, she had more than paid for herself. With the more favourable transportation facilities now offered, private trucking into the city would not be needed. Still the board of directors saw use in that vehicle. The truck was purchased. She was employed to run a daily service between Hillport and Preston Hollow, a farming centre some fourteen miles in the back country where excellent produce was grown but which had been too far out to give access to Hillport as frequently and freshly as the Coöperative's trade required. Furthermore, the sight of that truck was a perpetual reminder to the express and railroad companies to treat the Farm

Products Company with unfailing, yea, even a fear-and-trembling, courtesy.

The growth of the company before long required Bert's full time and a building to itself. The unfailing promptitude with which orders were filled, the quality standard that was maintained, and the taste wherewith the produce was prepared for shipment, were not long in bearing fruit. "Grown in Hillport" became a trade device of value.

The Coöperative now was able to offer prices for produce which sent an animating thrill into every part of the population. Dressed poultry, broilers particularly, were in demand. Bert, in fact, was urgent in spreading the news that he couldn't get enough of this kind of goods. Jim Borst heard him tell it one day. Jim was noticed for a time thereafter to be in an abstracted mood, in the gatherings of the "Cracker Barrel" group. Then the news was sounded abroad that he was tearing down his long unused barn, and with the materials was constructing poultry pens. Before long, his one-time cronies around the village-store stove were complaining that Jim was getting so all-fired excited about raising hens that he didn't have time to visit with his friends no more.

Vegetables, especially those of the prime sort, and tastefully prepared for market, were franti-

cally asked for, so that fields which for a long time had gone to weeds, now felt the plough scratching pleasantly their caked and itchy surfaces. That triangular nook back of the barn, hitherto accounted too small to bother with, would accommodate at least three rows of celery. And wasn't the Coöperative offering fancy prices for white bleached celery, every fall and winter? "John, you've just got to put that unused spot to use. It will grow five hundred celery bunches. I'll clean them, and tie them with the ribbons. And the money will keep the children in clothing all next winter."

New crops were introduced. Letters came from the city patrons asking for vegetables never grown in Hillport, some never even heard of before.

"Why don't some of you people grow mushrooms?" exclaimed Bert at one of the quarterly meetings of the company. "Here I'm being pestered with orders for that stuff all the time. We can't hold our customers unless we give them what they want." Most of those present had not known that mushrooms could be grown in their locality as a practical crop, to say nothing about the methods of it; and they shook their heads despairingly. But Al Becker's boy, Joe, was present. He was a school graduate, and

ambitious. He got Auntie Agnes to put a book in the library on mushroom growing. It wasn't long before the basement under his dad's wagon house was lined with mushroom beds. Soon he reaped profits that were gossiped all over the town.

Families in the village began to introduce home industries. They had no land, so as to become growers, but they could help in the work of prepared products, a demand for which was increasing. Under the tutelage of Bert, who was goaded to it by insistent orders from customers, families relearned long forgotten arts. They furnished jellied pigshead, smoked goose legs, cottage cheeses, jellied tongues. The picking of nut-meats was another industry, particularly after revelations had been published of the tenement workers who provided most of this product, and the unsanitary conditions of its preparation; so that a number of children made good money out of it, during the long winter evenings.

A stranger industry still was called into being. One day Bert got a letter asking if the company had for sale any collie pups — not the new-fangled, pointed-nose breed, so the letter went on to state, but the original and real collie, the old-fashioned, shag-haired, blunt-nosed breed, endowed with heart as well as brain, the breed that seems three

quarters human, and that furnished the hero stories of shepherd dogs in the old time. The writer explained that he had tried everywhere to get a dog of this kind for his children, but no kennel seemed to keep them.

Bert scratched his head. That the Hillport Farm Products Company was expected to go into the dog business was a poser for him. But the request could not be denied point-blank, because it was from one of their best customers. Therefore Bert made inquiry of the farmers as they came in. Finally one was found who remembered having seen a dog of that description at the house of a Scotch farmer in an adjoining town. Application there found a half-grown litter of pups, and when the Scotchman found he could get \$25 each for them, he established a kennel forthwith. One or two others took up the idea, and I guess now that the Hillport Farm Products Company is the one firm in the country that lists the shepherd collie breed as one of its regular products.

The want of a means of quick communication was not long in presenting itself. Bert would get an order, and would know the farmer who had just the article. But he lived three miles out. How to reach him? He hammered along under the handicap for some time, until one day he made up his mind: Hillport had to have a telephone

system. He got the Coöperative to take it up officially. The Hillport Neighbourhood Association endorsed the project and appointed a committee to work with the Coöperative's committee. A telephone system was introduced, the switch-board being in the back of the Coöperative's store; the operator was employed to keep the company's books between calls when the "hello" work was at lull.

Pete Mattice, as founder of the Coöperation, had built better than he knew. His position as president of it was making him a personage. Nor was he slow now to appraise its importance. He was jealous of any squint of alliance with the Neighbourhood Association, his oldtime rival and foe. Of late that association had adopted a course with relation to the Coöperative which Pete perceived to be full of menace to his tenure of office as president. Its members had begun to join the company in large numbers — Cushman, Mr. and Mrs. Corbin, Hendrick, Parson Dagner — the whole kit of them.

"Yes," exclaimed Pete bitterly, to one of his henchmen, "I know what they're after. They see that this here Coöperative is going to be a big shebang, and they're anxious to get aboard. They're trying to capture it, and vote me out as president. But I'll show 'em a thing or two."

The fact that the annual election of officers was due before long, filled Pete's breast with disturbing emotions. He perceived that the critical fight in his career was on. The colony folk had never forgiven him for walloping them in that School Board election. And now they were maturing their revenge in order to oust him from Hillport's boss-ship for good and all. He knew — none more clearly — that that lawyer fellow Cushman was sharp as lightning when it came to handling a meeting full of people. Yes, Cushman was a fellow to be feared. But Pete with his back to the wall was a doughty fighter, and into this present wrestle he put every energy of his nature. He made excuses to call on the members of the Co-operative and hinted rather broadly of the services he had rendered Hillport in starting this big new idea — which was true — exposing with vehemence the ambition of the "colony swells" to dominate the town.

At last the annual meeting drew around. Cushman and his side had laid their plans deep; in fact had worked so quietly that Pete, try as shrewdly as he might, could not ferret out the candidate they were going to run. The colony members were present at the meeting in force. Pete saw that it was to be a battle royal, and stiffened himself. When it came to election of

officers, his name was put into renomination by a partisan who had been coached for that purpose. Pete in the chair proposed — with a show of humility, but really in order to be on the floor where he could fight untrammelled — to put another chairman in his place. Cushman arose:

“What’s the use of that formality?” said he. “I move that the reelection of Pete Mattice be made unanimous.” It was seconded by Corbin. Pete was seen to gasp for breath, and try to say something; but though his lips worked, he couldn’t throw the clutch in, so to speak. The motion was put by Cushman, and was carried by acclamation.

“Do you know,” remarked Pete in telling of the thing afterward, “I shook hands with nearly all of them city folks, when the meeting was over. We got along together fine as anything. Why, say, that Cushman fellow isn’t at all a bad sort, after you get to know him.”



CHAPTER X



THOUGH Pete Mattice when he started it little realized the extent of the movement he was setting into operation, the Farm Products Company was nothing less than the beginning of Hillport's economic rehabilitation. Money began to circulate with freedom and even a something of abundance. There began to be seen the ennobling effect on character that is wrought by economic hope and independence. That instance of Jim Borst which I cited was typical. The reason why Jim had been idle through so much of his life was because he had seen

no prospect ahead. Let a ray or two of light penetrate the darkness ahead of him, he picked up spirit at once, and became an enthusiastic breeder of poultry.

Hillport as a whole had gone off into a shiftless brand of citizenship because of the blankness of its life. As Billy Beekman used to say when Bassler would urge him to get to work — Bassler was growing anxious over the store bill — “What’s the use? Planting corn ain’t no use; don’t get nothin’ for it. Potatoes ain’t no use. Cattle ain’t no use. Nothin’ ain’t no use.” And it was distinctly true: “Nothing ain’t no use.”

But when, for that “nothin’,” there was substituted “something,” then life took on for Hillport a hue of worth-whileness and meaning. With money flowing in, through the Farm Products Company’s credit slips, store bills began to be paid and debts liquidated. Thereby, backs began to straighten up. For there is nothing like a debt piled onto the back, to bow the head and bend all the frame.

Moreover, with the first glimmering of economic independence, came a desire for more. Men began to count their expenditures, and to note those that were profitless. Then was made a discovery of some importance. Hillport awoke to the fact that it was paying out money for stuff that could

be grown right in its own borders. Yes, paradoxical as it may seem, was buying from the city, produce that had been raised in Hillport.

For this was the way of it: gardens in the village had been caught in the general decay. The outlying farmers, on the other hand, had had no thought of the local market, but had shipped their stuff in to the commission merchants in the city. There it was exposed in the city market. The next day or two, country peddlers of green goods would drive into the city, buy up the left-overs at bargain rates, and haul it back into the country to hawk from house to house. So that Hillport villagers were paying two and three prices for stuff that was at two and three removes from the fresh earth wherein it had once been fresh and succulent.

The birth of village pride put the Hillport folk on their mettle. People in surrounding towns began to talk about the "Hillporters" as of a distinct type of human being, much to the augmenting of the village's self-estimation. They resolved that the village should be self-supporting. Therefore back of every house a kitchen garden began to be cultivated. And for a truck peddler to be seen in front of any man's gate was now a disgrace to the man; brought upon him a something of scorn from the neighbours. Not openly,

to be sure, nor perhaps conscious, but in the sub-conscious deeps, a feeling that all was not right with a man who, living in the country, bought his green stuff from the city.

This feeling, once implanted, went on even beyond the question of vegetables. "Why in Sam Hill don't we Hillporters raise our own meat?" asked Al Becker, at one of the meetings of the Coöperative. Those present looked at each other blankly. Not one could answer the question, for the reason that not one had ever thought of the matter; they had taken it for granted that the only source of meat supply was Lape's butcher shop there on Railroad Avenue, where Western beef was sold for 25 cents a pound; choice cuts, 35.

"Al, you tell us why," came a voice from the middle of the room — a question half in banter, but also half out of a real desire for information.

"Blamed if I know why," said Al. "With meat at 35 cents, it would be a crop worth anybody's raising. Why in thunder we don't go in for it is too deep for me."

"I'll tell you why," put in Bert Re Qua, from his seat over by the secretary's table. "It's because of the loggishness of the human mind. We're such infernal creatures of habit, and particularly of mental habit. Forty years ago, with

the opening up of the West, the farmers out East here did well to go out of the meat-producing business. But the West with its free prairies and scant population is no more. Land there is limited now, even as it is here. Besides, great cities have sprung up out there to consume their cattle. Therefore meat is scarce, and all the time getting scarcer."

"But the people don't want our product," some one called from the back of the hall. "They want Western meat, not Eastern."

"Of course they do," replied Bert, "if by Eastern beef you mean tough and stringy critters that have been worked for other purposes during their natural lives and are sold to Lape here to be butchered, only after they are too old for anything else. But cattle raised and fattened for the market will be just as tender and juicy here on our Eastern hills as on the Western plains."

"Sounds to me like mighty good horse sense," spoke up Hal Cushman, from his seat in the body of the house. First along when he had joined the Farm Products Company, the native farmers had looked askance at Cushman; were suspicious of "these lily-handed gentleman farmers." But Cushman had not been long in convincing them that, though his main business was that of a city attorney, none the less his eleven acres here at

Hillport were tilled as skilfully and as productively as any to be found in all these parts. And the farmers had ended by accepting him into their fellowship, and even respecting his opinions. So, now, when he spoke up, he got a hearing.

"I think," he went on, "that the time is not far off when we here in Hillport will raise all the beef and mutton we consume. Talk about carrying coals to Newcastle! That's what we're doing when we import butcher's meat into a country of open fields and golden corn like this. So why not get started? Of course, we would wish to breed only the best kind of stock. Therefore a blooded bull would be needed. Some farmer hereabout would be willing to keep him for free service in return. We would need a blooded ram, too."

Yes, they saw the wisdom of Hal Cushman's words. Farming is too scientific a pursuit to bother any longer with grade cattle and mongrel breeds. The upshot was the purchase by the company of a Holstein bull and a pedigreed ram. And the people began to grow their own beef-steaks, legs of mutton, lamb chops. Indeed, the enthusiasm for "raised-in Hillport" meat became so widespread that pork was added to the list. So much so that the thing was invading the village precincts until the town authorities interfered and established "hog limits."

Yes, the town was certainly finding itself. It was discovering the blessedness that is in country life when once the people have learned to act together. At present this same spirit of community pride is taking a further development. Hillport, like most of our rural neighbourhoods, had been slow to discover that the apple is a marketable commodity of fine possibilities. Apple trees? Yes, each farmer had a few scattered around on his place; but they were for his own table; and what orchards there were had been allowed, since the invasion of the market by the Oregon apple, to grow up into gnarls and scraggles.

But Bert Re Qua received a letter or two from city consumers asking for a shipment of Hillport apples. He was unable to fill the orders, and out of curiosity wrote to them asking why they sent to him for apples when the city was full of Oregon fruit. They replied that the Oregon apple was expensive; and that, furthermore, they were hungry for the flavour of the home-grown variety as they had known it back in boyhood.

That put Bert to thinking. He made some inquiries. Found that, although the Western apple is larger and seemlier to the eye, those qualities are at the expense of the fine rich flavour of our Eastern product. Therefore he brought up the matter in one of his annual reports, with some

figures as to what the Company could probably pay for Hillport-grown apples. The result is that old orchards have been dressed up for use once more. New orchards have been set out. Aunty Agnes has had to lay in a small library of books on the apple. And a new product has been added to Hillport's rapidly extending list.

One day Pete Mattice was in Bassler's store, keeping "the boys" in line, and he took a seat on the bread hamper. A few minutes later the clerk came and disturbed him for a moment while he lifted the lid to take out some bread for a customer. Hillport buying city-baked bread! Peter had never thought of it before. But now the thing smote him in all of its absurdity. What was the Coöperative for, if it wasn't to teach Hillport to have her own industries, at least sufficient to feed herself? At the next meeting of the directors he proposed a bakeshop. At once he was met by the argument: Cheaper to buy in the city, where they turn out loaves of bread by the thousand.

"Now see here," said Pete, "there are other things to be considered besides cheapness. This specializing, whereby some huge bakery ships bread across half the state and reduces a hundred towns to a state of dependency on the city, is going too darned far. The old days, when a

community lived its own life industrially, was better for the country districts. General farming produced a bigger and sturdier type of soul than the special farming of to-day where a man raises nothing but milk, and wouldn't know a Dorset ram from a hitching post. We must encourage local industries. And we'll be the gainer in the long run. This is a day of specialization-run-wild. One's answer to this question depends on one's view of life. If the purpose is to produce the greatest possible number of things, things, things, then specialization is good. But if the purpose is to produce an independent all-round big type of man, then we must make a man able to supply all of his wants, as our grandfathers were able."

His words carried the day. Indeed, the moment he touched on local pride, he had the Company half won over. They built an oven and started a village bakeshop. "That's specialization, in the proper sense of the word," explained Pete; "it takes the hot baking out of a hundred homes, and puts them together into one; but without removing them from Hillport entirely and thereby destroying her community life."

Furthermore, true to the Coöperative's business policy, this village bakery turned out a product that had "tone." It cost more to put weight into

the bread and produce a loaf of the real "home-made" variety. But the people appreciated it. Very quickly thereafter the bread hamper at Bassler's store, that had brought in its semi-weekly cargo of fluffy, savourless stuff, was out of commission, and was put to use as a receiving crate for fresh vegetables from the country round about.

Then came what has proved to be the most interesting and potential development of all in this effort of Hillport toward local self-respect—the Village Cannery. Like all of the other important movements which go to make up this record, it came by a process of growth. Those who were foremost in starting it had little thought of the stature into which it would stretch itself and the possibilities inherent in the idea.

The Coöperative was originally, as has been shown, a selling concern, whereby the Hillport growers banded together to get their product to the consumer without the costly assistance of the middleman. But, as John Corbin once said, explaining to some guests at his home the marvellous developments that had resulted from the Hillport Idea, "when people once form the habit of working together, there's no telling what strange and fine things it may lead into. Co-operation is a wizard-worker. Union is force.

Man is the most powerful creature under the sun. And when several of these powerful creatures pool their forces, an energy aggregates therefrom which no obstacle can resist."

Therefore it was not long before the members of the Farm Products Company were buying their fertilizer through that central medium, in car-load quantities. The next step was to get their farm implements through the same channel and thus save the expensive agent's commission by which formerly they had been milked. And before long they were purchasing through the Company a half dozen or more articles the consumption of which was in quantities, and where wholesale buying offered substantial savings.

One summer, just before canning time, a number of the farmers' wives, Mrs. Updike at their head, got together and asked why the Company could not purchase their sugar for them; and thus not only get barrel rates, but also, by buying it ahead, forestall the advance in price always due about fruit-preserving time. Their request was heeded. Hillport, for the first time in its history, saw a freight car run out on the siding entirely loaded with sugar, to the delectation of good Mrs. Updike and her sorority of coöperators.

It was one of the village women, however, Mrs. Frisbie, who contributed the idea which gave the

thing its greatest extension. She was in her kitchen one morning, doing up her year's supply of cherries, steaming them in the great dishpan on top of the stove — and steaming herself red in the face, in the process. Widow Hollenbeck dropped in to see if she could borrow Mrs. Frisbie's cherry-pitter. For she, too, was in the throes.

The two women visited for a space. Mrs. Frisbie bemoaned the fact that "preserving" always came in dog-day time — a hot fire in hot weather; and with her apron she wiped the perspiration from her face, by way of commentary.

"Wouldn't it be fine," said she, "if all of this muss and heat could be taken out of our separate houses into some central place — like we have done with our bread-baking, for instance?" It was a remark thrown off in the unregarding flow of small talk, and was quickly submerged in other themes.

However, when Mrs. Hollenbeck — armed with the cherry-pitter — had taken her departure, Mrs. Frisbie recurred to the words that had popped to her lips. A central cannery! Not in the least a preposterous idea. The more heated she became, in stewing over the stove, the more warm became likewise the idea fermenting in her brain. She talked it over with some of the other women. Their husbands were consulted and became inter-

ested — the saving in the fuel bill, by combining this work from a hundred kitchens into one, was chiefly the argument that appealed to them. If farmers in a dairy section, instead of running each his own creamery or cheese factory, have found it advantageous to have a central plant, why not a few of the household industries also? Pete Mattice's coöperation was secured. (The women have votes at school elections.) The Farm Products Company took hold of the scheme. The "Hillport Cannery" was the result.

The grain store over on Railroad Avenue was for rent. The Coöperative, by going into the importing of commodities as well as export, had put this private concern out of business; the owner, turning his attention now to poultry, established the "Will Dunn Goose Farm" just out of the village limits. This store was turned into a cannery, in charge of the McBain family, which took up their residence in the second story. The neighbours bring their fruit there and receive credits exchangeable for jars of fruit. The work is done by the women of the village, who get credit slips for the amount of time they give, a telephone upstairs enabling McBain to find out the day before about how many of the neighbours to expect, and to map out the work accordingly.

To tell the truth, this village cannery is not

run on a high-pressure time-sheet basis. It would make a factory manager, accustomed to punch-clocks and efficiency systems, nervously prostrate. The women there waste an unconscionable amount of the day in gossiping. But then, on the other hand, they don't get much pay for their services. I believe the credit slips given out to them amount to something like eight cents an hour; and payable not in cash, either, but in preserves. Even that modest wage has had to be reduced, because it was attracting the women in greater numbers than could be put to use. It is a neighbourhood centre — headquarters for news from all the country round, a clearing house for fashions in millinery and dressmaking, a kind of continuous sociable.

And not only during dog days, either. When berry time and cherries and plums are past, with currant jellies and crabapple and quince, then come pears. Thereupon the apples begin to arrive. And the preserving of these lasts well on into the winter. Even the spring months also are occupied, because a number of the home industries such as nut-meats, cheeses, and jellied meats, "Braised Beef, Hillport Style," etc., have been transferred thither, and have made it into a twelve-months' plant.

Grape drink — the stuff in its natural unfer-

mented state — may almost be said to be a discovery of our time. The medicinal qualities of it, its cheapness and plentifulness, the facility with which it lends itself to a multitude of delightful beverages, bid fair to render it a formidable competitor with the alcoholic brand. The Hillport Cannery was not long in availing itself of this modern invention. It installed a grape press. And September days see each morning many baskets of grapes transporting thither, to be turned into bottles of the clear delicious liquid, to grace the family table, the sick chamber, and social reunions, during all the following winter. Greatly to the stimulus also, of grape-growing in Hillport.

But I am inclined to think that the greatest use of the cannery has been the feminine sociability which it has promoted. "Preserves" time is no longer the bugbear it used to be in the days of drudgery in lone kitchens. It's a neighbourhood festival, now. And the grape-juice season has almost the character of the vintage harvest in some town of central France; so finely is the community spirit prevalent when the neighbours begin to bring their baskets of blue and white and red grapes, and the rich grape-blood trickles through the crevices of the press bursting with its luscious burden.

I wish I could leave the reader with that picture of neighbourhood sociability under the roof of what was once a dry and dusty grain store. But veracity compels me to record the thing to the end. And truth is, that idyllic scene is being invaded of late by commercialism, which threatens in time to exclude the housewives of Hillport from their community centre and workshop.

The city people learned about the jams and jellies and preserved fruits put up by the Hillport Cannery. Letters from the city customers began to come in to Bert, asking why he didn't get up to date and list home-made preserves among the Company's products. The city people, so the letters stated, were tired of jellies made out of coal-tar extracts, imitation jam, and fruit flavoured with chemicals, or put up in tin cans. Their jaded appetites craved the old-fashioned preserves made out of fruit ripened by nature, done up in pure cane sugar, in glass jars — like the kind mother used to make and which were brought up from the swinging shelf down cellar when company came for dinner or for a quilting-party supper. Furthermore, it would give the article an added zest, if it came from a firm and from a neighbourhood whose products had an established reputation, and therefore would be a guarantee against imitation and adulterations.

Could Bert stand out against so plaintive a plea, so piteous a supplication? Not he. His heart was smitten with sympathy — also with a desire to add to the dividend rate that should be declared by the Company at its next annual meeting. Therefore he got a few gross of glass jars, latest design and of durable construction, and had the cannery fill them with some of its fruit and jams; these he listed down in one corner of the monthly price-bulletin. Lo, and behold! the stuff was snapped up so quickly that he had to withdraw the quotations in the next issue, and print a note explaining that no more orders could be filled this year.

That was an eye-opener. He got out a circular letter straightway, which he mailed to every household in the town of Hillport. "Grow Fruit!" was the headline, in forceful, mandatory type-face. He announced that the next year the cannery would be asked to put up hundreds and hundreds of jars of fruit and preserves of every kind. Let the community get busy at once and prepare for the demand that was going to come as sure as next springtime's sun: "Set out bushes and plants and trees betimes! Do it now. Plant strawberries! Plant raspberries! Plant gooseberries! Plant plums — and apples — and grapes — and peaches — and pears — and quinces — and cherries! What

varieties? Every variety. We'll take all you can grow."

Hillport got busy. She woke up to the fact that she was fitted in a remarkable degree for the growing of fruits and berries. And the cannery next year got busy also. Took all the products Hillport could offer. And even sent out into surrounding towns for supplies.

It was not long before still a new kind of product was added to the cannery's output — vegetables put up in glass jars. It started more or less as an accident. Al Snyder found himself in possession of a more plentiful crop of butter beans than his family could consume. The neighbours were also full-supplied. What to do? His wife persuaded the cannery to put up for her in its glass jars some of the luscious beans, carefully stringed and of a young tender picking. Vegetables in glass jars! The good wives of the town stared blankly at this Snyder family. But when, that following winter, those jars were opened, and some of the neighbours were given a taste of the product, sentiment veered rapidly. Here was something new; something that the commercial stuff, ranged in rows of tin cans on the shelves in Bassler's store, couldn't match.

Keen to catch a point, and particularly since his experience with fruit preserves, Bert got the

cannery to put up a supply of garden stuff. He inserted in the price-list: "Selected Hillport vegetables, put up in glass jars, for our customers only." His city clientele were not long in discovering that here was an addition to their family table, an addition which the grocery with its tin-can product, a product, moreover, put up in commercial factories "for the wholesale trade," had not been able to offer. And a trade was not long in building itself. To be sure this Hillport product cost more. But then, it was free from taint of tin, and was of a type of vegetable garden-grown and fancy picked. Bert had coined a new trade term for it — "Preserved Vegetables."

Moreover, when the glass jars had been resold to the company for five cents each, the excess in price was found to be greatly lowered. The Company has had a supply of glass jars blown with its name in, and sends its auto truck into the city twice a year to make the round of its customers and gather up the empty jars. Incidentally the perambulation through the residential streets, of that truck freshly painted in white and gold with

HILLPORT FARM PRODUCTS COMPANY

YOUR TABLE
JUST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS FROM THE FARM

in tasteful gold letters on the big expanse of white, is proving an advertisement of no slight efficacy. Bert has the truck repainted twice yearly; each time just before its semi-annual excursion to the city.

All of which is having an effect on the morals of the Hillport Cannery. Gone are the free and easy days when housewives would assemble there for a day of work — and visitings. It's becoming a busier place every year. The family upstairs has given way to a trained manager who pushes things at what the women declare to be a "shameful pace": "Why, he won't allow no talking during working hours, but scowls and comes around and says, 'A little faster, ladies; these orders were marked with a hurry-up tag and have got to be shipped to-morrow.'"

Not that this "hurry-up" régime has been permitted to lower the standard of the product. What! lower the quality of the Hillport Farm Products Company's output! Bert Re Qua would bite at a man quick who should propose such a thing. But it has introduced a business management that is cutting off corners at an ever sharper angle. And only girls and women, who can give their entire time, are now wanted on the pay-roll.

Mrs. Frisbie and her fellow housewives sigh for the good old times. But their husbands re-

mind them of the increase in the dividends declared by the Coöperative since the new manager came to the cannery, adding a remark that "if this quarterly dividend keeps on growing, no reason in the world why Charlie can't go to college when he gets through school here." And straightway the sore is salved.



CHAPTER XI



This



thing that was taking place in Hillport was nothing less than a rediscovery of the power of community life, the possibilities resident in the community mind. As Dagner put it in one of his sermons, "Coöperation manifolds human power with a multiple that knocks the arithmetic of the schools into a cocked hat." The sermon was on the text, "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst."



Said Dagner: "When a community becomes a real community instead of merely an agglomeration of individuals, as was Hillport before this

new dispensation set in, power is increased in ways that truly are astonishing. Children are taught at school that ten times one are ten. But when your computation is in terms of human units, ten times one are a hundred. I wish to be understood as speaking literally. Ten men working together can accomplish one hundred times as much as ten men working separately; yes, can achieve results clearly out of the competency of any number of men who should attempt it in their individual strengths alone.

"I liken this thing to the flowings of water across the landscape. When the separate springs in a countryside seek to find their way to the ocean by unrelated independent channels, their waters do not get far. The flow progresses for some distance. But the obstructions are too great; it ceases to make headway; becomes a swampy spot and a nuisance. So was it with the Hillport of that old sad yesterday. Fine energies were welling forth in the human beings that inhabited her. But there was no commingling of these energy-outputs. Each life sought a vent for itself in a course separate from the others. So that the impediments in the way easily obtained the mastery. And the spring, dammed back upon itself, became choked, was discouraged to flow.

"At present there is no more of power being

generated in these human units of Hillport than formerly. But they are working in unison. The wellsprings are merging their flow. And with what a difference in the result! Instead of swampy, stagnant spots, a stream is now at flow. A stream which is broadening into a river, with power in its current, and freshness in its waters, and whose deepness lends itself to the navigable uses of men."

It was this idea of the community that brought Dagner into touch with Dogtown, and with the notorious Becky Bush of that region. Dogtown had no church, and in the old days had been left by Hillport quite to itself; to badness and civic degradation. What interest could it be to Hillport to concern herself with outlying settlements, how backward soever those settlements might be?

But with the coming in of the new spirit, the spirit of citizenship, there was brought to pass in the Hillport brain a new viewpoint. The community's solidarity was now the basic idea. It was perceived that a village cannot go forward unless it is willing to take the surrounding peoples along.

Dagner kept insisting: we are climbers tied together with a rope; and the rearmost man is the measure of the progress of us all. In quite literal fashion this was true in the present case. The badnesses that were in Dogtown were constantly

enticing Hillport's young men. Therefore that sub-station of the library which Aunty Agnes had established in the Pindar home over by Dogtown. And also Dagner's attempt now to bring some civilization to bear on Becky Bush.

Becky was a known character. And a bad one. The man she was living with at that time was not her husband. Indeed, the less said about her marital relations the better. Her trade was the growing of leeches. Not that the treatment of disease by those blood-suckers was still practised; that is, not to any extent. The district school and Doctor Rivenburg had nearly stamped out that superstition. But the leeches were used for the reducing of "black eyes." And it must be admitted, at this they were efficient. Though a fellow's eye be never so swollen from impact of an opponent's knuckles — collision with an open door in the dark, is the way the fellow usually explained it — let one of Becky's leeches be fastened there, in half an hour the worm would have the congested blood out of the man's face into its own body, and the man would look almost normal. Because of the rough-neck character of the neighbourhood, the worms were in rather constant demand. Becky charged 25 cents per leech, and made enough to keep herself in whiskey and morphine — whiskey when she couldn't get morphine.

She was web-fingered and web-toed, inherited from her mother; illustrating what the doctors tell us, namely, that this particular deformity, for some reason or other, seems to abide in the germ plasm, and is congenital as perhaps none other. Becky had a girl, Nellie, about thirteen years old, and of rather good looks, excepting that she, too, had the congenital trait. When the grandmother was alive, the three of them were used to be exhibited in a side show at county fairs: "The Web-footed Family."

Well, Dagner was paying a visit one day at the Pindar home. And Mrs. Pindar asked him pleadingly if something couldn't be done for Nellie: "Mr. Dagner, some one has got to take the case in hand. Becky is getting worse all the time. She's been on a drunk for a week now, and has been running around with a negro. In these drunken fits she drags Nellie downstairs by the hair of the head and threatens to take a shotgun to her. And she's the kind of a woman to do it, too." Dagner made inquiries of other neighbours, found the facts were as Mrs. Pindar had stated, and saw that something had to be done.

He got the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to send out one of their agents. They arrested Becky, took the child into their city home, and the Justice of the Peace sentenced

Becky to thirty days in the county jail. In a few days Dagner got word from the society that they had secured a surgeon who would operate upon Nellie's hands without cost and sever the web that bound her fingers so that she would be able to work and become a self-respecting woman. But the state law required that the mother's consent be secured in writing. Would Dagner kindly wait upon Becky and secure her consent for the surgeon to proceed?

Dagner, with a paper made out for her to sign, started for the county jail to interview Becky. On the way, remembering the kind of intellect he had to encounter, he stopped at the store and bought a quarter-pound bag of snuff. Becky had been in jail for ten days now, and would be keen for some of her wonted luxuries.

Sure enough, his forebodings came true. When Dagner called Becky to the grating of her cell and explained the nature of the request that the society was making of her, he was met by a flat refusal. She would not let surgeon's knife touch one of her family.

"But, Becky, the operation is a most simple one. No danger in the least. Practically no pain. And then Nellie will have capable hands and can get work like other girls instead of being kicked around through life as you have been."

No, she wouldn't hear to it. Their family had been meant to be web-fingered. And web-fingered they would ——

Dagner took the bag of snuff from his pocket. He let her see it, but kept it outside of the bars beyond her reach. His forecasting was correct. Ten days of famine from her accustomed stimulants had wrought her nerves to a high pitch of hunger.

"I'll sign, I'll sign," said she, and she reached out for the snuff. Dagner kept the bag out of her reach until the warden had brought pen and ink and Becky through the bars had signed a cross opposite her name on the paper. The snuff was handed over. And Dagner forwarded the signed paper to the society in the city.

The operation on Nellie's hands was performed, and was successful. And thus a new direction was given to a family that until then had presented a probably unbroken career of degeneracy; or rather, unregeneracy, seeing that it was a case of never-had-been-civilized, instead of used-to-be-civilized, but-now-slipping.

Some of the neighbours said it was a risky thing for Dagner to have done.

"Why, Mr. Dagner," exclaimed Mrs. Updike to him one day, as he was going up the road past her farm, "you don't know that Becky. When she

gets out, she'll hide behind a fence some day as you are going along the road, and shoot you." Dagner laughed. Said it was in the day's work, and asked how her cantaloupes were getting on. The Updikes had devised a way of giving cantaloupes an extra early start by transplanting from hotbeds. And the neighbours were much interested to see if the thing would be permanently successful.

Mrs. Corbin and Janet Blake were sailing one day out on the inlet, in the former's boat, the *Naïad*. Mrs. Corbin was an excellent yachts-woman, and the *Naïad* would oftentimes be witnessed carrying full canvas, in a spanking white-sea breeze. Not so hazardous a thing, however, as it might appear to an observer watching the craft keel over even to the combing. Because it was a sloop-yacht — a 22-footer — and excellently balanced as to her sail-spread. By cleating the main sheet fast, the boat could be controlled alone by the jib sheet. So that a woman's strength was equal to the boat's perfect mastery. How nasty soever the puff, by easing off on the jib, the *Naïad* would luff with instant promptitude, spill the wind from her mainsail, and assume again her upright even keel.

On the present occasion Mrs. Corbin's splendid seamanship was not requisite. For the afternoon

was pacific; hardly enough wind to keep the water blue and the wake of the boat white. The two women were seated in the stern. The twins, Max and Davie, were perched forward on the bow deck. They were in bathing suits — bare heads, bare arms, bare legs, tanned well-nigh to the colour of the flannel of their suits. They had exacted from their mother a pledge not to put hand on the tiller, and were amusing themselves by steering the boat from the jib sheet alone, being highly elated at the success they were achieving.

“Have you heard that Mr. Dagner has received a call to a city church?” asked Mrs. Corbin, as they were sailing along the shore line and a glimpse of the Hillport church steeple came into view through an opening between the hills.

Janet started, but her agitation was not perceived by the other women.

“No,” she answered, “I hadn’t heard the news. But then, dad and I are so alien to church circles that tidings from that centre are always slow in reaching us.” She paused a moment to recover her colour. Then: “I know of no one who has earned a promotion more than Mr. Dagner. He certainly has worked; and the people here will miss him. When does he go to his new field?”

“Oh, he isn’t going,” replied Mrs. Corbin.

"He sent word back to the committee that he was grateful for the honour they had done him, but he couldn't accept."

"But why? I don't understand," and Janet struggled womanfully to regain her composure. "It's a larger church, isn't it? And surely more in the centre of things than is Hillport. Not that I believe George Dagner the kind of a man to be attracted by money considerations. Daddy is that cynical, he, of course, would say: 'The bigger the salary, the louder the call.' But that fails to do justice to many a minister. Larger salaries imply fields of greater power. And surely, a young man, to the extent that he is worthily ambitious, wishes to invest his life at the highest rate of influence possible."

"Yes," replied the other woman, "and Mr. Dagner thought of that. He showed me the letter he sent to the committee. He told them that in the present case greater influence lay in the country than in the city. Not that he censured the ministers who migrate cityward. There are talents that are fitted for urban tasks. But he felt that he himself was called to rural service. Nor was this, he explained, a modesty in him. To the contrary: the countryside and its problems, said he, are to-day greater than those of the city; because they have been so long neglected.

Therefore in dedicating himself to a field from which other men were running away, he was appraising himself at a very high figure. He estimated his own life so exaltedly, that he wished it to be occupied in tasks wherein others had failed. I recall the exact words with which his letter ended: 'Pardon me, gentlemen, for saying it, but anybody can run a city church; whereas to cope with America's rural problem is to-day exacting unusual powers. And egoism tells me that my work at Hillport is not proving altogether fruitless.'"

"It wasn't egoism at all that told him that. It was the plain truth. I ——" Janet stopped short, disturbed at the heat into which she had been betrayed. Mrs. Corbin noticed the unusual warmth of her tones, and looked over at her: "Why, Janet, what's ailing you? You're as white as that mainsail.

"And, Janet Blake" — this, as the other persisted to remain silent — "I don't think you are looking well at all, these days. I haven't said anything to you about it, because I never mention people's looks to them except when I have something heartening to remark; but now I must speak. Tell me, are you up to weight?"

Janet remained silent, her look glued to the slatting in the cockpit's bottom. "No, Mrs.

Corbin, I'm not up to weight," finally she blurted out. "And I'm going away from home for a time, to rest up. Not that I'm overworked," and she laughed at the absurdity of that idea, "but I'm sort of run down."

Mrs. Corbin moved her cushion over alongside Janet, and took her hand: "Janet, you must tell me."

"Well, the relations between Mr. Dagner and me are strained. I've been wanting to tell somebody, oh, ever so long," and Janet, the constraint at last broken, spoke freely, now for the first time in weeks. "Oh, no, no quarrel. We work together on committees, are outwardly amicable. But there's an estrangement just the same; and all the greater because covered beneath an outward show of cordiality. It came through a query from him one day as we were taking a ramble together: Why didn't I take some interest in the life of the spirit in this modern world?"

"Janet," said Mrs. Corbin, "I've long been wishing I could have a good talk with you along that line. The trouble is, you don't know how antiquated you are. You think that religion means the old exploded ideas and formulas. Why, we also have got away from that. And yet without giving up the principle of reverence — that disciplined sense of awe in presence of the sublimities that gird us on every side. If reverence

shall ever disappear, will not something very precious have passed out of our lives?"

"Oh, I know, and ——" put in Janet.

But Mrs. Corbin would not suffer her: "Let me speak. Do you remember your Latin, from boarding-school days? *Re* and *ligo*, to bind together. Religion is that which gets people together and keeps them together. Without it, community life is not possible, so thickly in our mortal natures are sown the seeds of disunion. The high mortality rate in village improvement societies declares it. Haphazard, helter-skelter things, unrelated to the scheme of existence, these societies have briefest continuance. Whereas here in Hillport, because we have made the church a centre of our activities, the neighbourhood movement has struck deep roots and is flourishing more and more."

Again Janet essayed to speak, but again Mrs. Corbin continued: "I am willing to grant you that science, with its discovery of the reign of law, is making the old gods to sit infirm upon their thrones, but the Presence that broods over the social realm is not disparaged by those discoveries. Do you recall what Maeterlinck tells of the bee? How that there is a spirit of the hive, a power invisible, not localized in any one bee but present to them all, a spirit that welds them into a swarm. Without the issuing of outward orders,

the five thousand bees do the same thing at the same time; no jar or discordance among them; seeing that they are wrought upon by the presence that is over them. It is more than an illustration. Hillport is brooded over by a Presence, unseen, but potently operative. He it is that is getting us together. The church is the training school both in reverence and in this thing known as community team-work. Now Dagner ——”

But Janet spoke: “Mrs. Corbin, you don’t understand; and Mr. Dagner doesn’t understand, either. I am heartily a believer. I know perfectly the truth of all that you say, and would gladly help at the church; but there’s daddy. I can’t go against him. And this warfare of loyalties within me is rending me asunder. For it is a real warfare. Toward Mr. Dagner it has compelled me to belie some of my deepest beliefs. I agree with his position and yours, perfectly. One couldn’t live in a neighbourhood that was unchurched and irreligious. A room full of dancers hardly recognizes the presence of the music. But let the music stop — quickly, what a difference! It is possible to keep on dancing without the music. But now it is become a thing without zest, a room full of people whose movements are incoördinated — a thing of drudgery and chaos. What that aerial, intangible music is to a dance-room, religion is to a community; it puts

rhythm into our doings, and makes the task zestful. I recognize all that. But then — but then, one has a duty to one's father also."

"Janet, I'm wondering if, in a matter so weighty as this, one is not required to live one's own life, even though it violate at some point the dictates of filial affection."

"Don't, Mrs. Corbin, please don't." And Janet's tones were vibrant with entreaty. "Daddy is such a dear! And he has only me. I know his ways are gruff. But, oh, if people could only know how ardent his social hopes and visions were once upon a time. And you know, it is the sweetest things that, once turned, go into bitterest. You see how I am between two opinions summoning me in opposite directions. It tears me. I entreat you, don't make it harder."

Mrs. Corbin made no reply. In silence she watched the boys at the bow maneuver the boat. The afternoon was drawing to a close. And the boys had turned the prow homeward.

"I feel the need of other scenes for a while," said Janet as the yacht moored at its riding-anchor and they got into the dory to go ashore. "A former-time school friend has been coaxing me to journey abroad with her. I've consented."

And Mrs. Corbin also thought that, all in all, it was the best thing to do.



CHAPTER XII



EVER a village was taken by surprise, it was Hillport when she was visited with the typhoid.

What with an awakening church, a library-on-wheels, the clubhouse for the young and their civic league, the fine fellowship now between the villagers and the "colony," the Americanizing of Tony Rebuto and his Shantytown fellows, the Fine and Fit Fourth, and the prosperity of the Farm Products Company, the town had come to have something of a superstition of itself as the pet of Providence. When, therefore, one day in June, Doctor Rivenburg re-

ported a case of typhoid in Hammy Van Dyke's family next door to the post office, Hillport resented it as almost a breach of faith on the part of Destiny. When another case was reported the next week, she began to scare, and two additional cases in as many days cast her into a panic. She awoke to the fact that an epidemic was upon her.

Hendrick, who was president of the Neighbourhood Association that year, called a special meeting at his house. Not many came out; the village folk were too stunned. But enough were present to do business. It was voted to telegraph to the city for the services of a hygiene engineer. The expert was on the ground the next afternoon and set to work at once. He made some interesting discoveries.

A rivulet, Stony Brook, flows through Hillport, taking its rise in springs some six miles above the village. In its course through the town it winds between the church and the schoolhouse. Because of the sweetness of its waters, the children, both in the public school and the Sunday school, had been used, in the cooler seasons, to drink from it. The bacterioscopic test disclosed typhoid bacilli in its waters, and the medical expert, pursuing his researches, located the source of the infection on Abe Vroman's farm, three miles out. Vroman's house is some distance from Stony Brook,

and, ordinarily, was not dangerous to it. But that winter one of his boys had complained for a long time of "not feeling well." It was found that this had been a case of "ambulatory" typhoid. No precautions had been taken, and a heavy spring rain, washing sewage-polluted soil from around the house into the brook, had poisoned a number of families in Hillport at one blow.

Nor was this all. Because of the ground strata, the wells in the village are for the most part shallow. The Hillport backyard is commonly her sewage receptacle, and the typhoid germs, unsterilized before the expert arrived on the scene, had in a number of instances been washed into wells, apparently through subsoil fissures. The hygiene specialist found furthermore that the bacillus had been borne by flies. This latter mode, once the disease had obtained a seat in the village, was a dread means of conveyance, because of the unsanitary habits in so many of the homes. Flies, wallowing in the infected sewage-soil around a stricken house, would take their flight in through the unguarded window of a neighbour's kitchen, trail his hairy feet over the food there, and thereby damn that home as a new infection-centre.

The first thing was to rally the town, to get the spirits of the people back into a hopeful and

fighting mood. Therefore a meeting was called in the schoolhouse at the close of one of the afternoon sessions. To grown-ups and children alike, the expert, with Doctor Rivenburg to introduce him to the people, gave a talk on typhoid fever. He showed that the discovery of its bacillus had made it possible to fight the disease effectually, and that anger rather than fear was the fit emotion wherewith to face the situation. Thereupon he stated the plan of campaign. The infected wells had already been located and quarantined. A vaccine against the disease was one of the recent achievements of medical science, he said; and he told how the serum was extracted from the blood of a horse. He ordered that all the people in the heart of the village where the plague was seated should receive vaccination. This latter step was taken, the charge being borne by the Neighbourhood Association, which also had made itself responsible for the expenses of the expert's visit to the town.

Skilled attendance on the sick was obligatory. The importance of careful and intelligent nursing in this disease was one of the points the specialist had industriously hammered. Accordingly a graduate nurse was brought out from the city. The association assumed the expense. It was explained that, though all who could afford it would be

expected to pay something, nevertheless her services were freely at the disposal of all the families stricken. She visited each day the afflicted houses, and superintended the nursing. She also gathered the women together in neighbourhood "mothers' meetings," and gave them talks on sanitation, precautionary measures such as boiling the water, fly screens, the danger in uncooked vegetables such as lettuce and celery. She emphasized the importance of toning up the health of every member of the family as a prophylactic, because typhoid takes hold of the individuals who are of a lowered vitality.

The effect of this determined attack on the invader was not long in showing itself. The increase in the number of cases was checked. Confidence once restored, the people recovered their spirits and set to work. There was a general cleaning out of cess-pits and back-door puddles. Bassler's store had such a rush for window and door screens that he had to replenish his stock thrice in one season. With only two exceptions — one of them Van Dyke's boy, Joe — the sick were nursed back to health, and the plague was stayed.

The official announcement that Hillport's epidemic was over, came when notice was given at a meeting of the Neighbourhood Association, that

the services of the nurse being no longer required, the treasury could be lightened by taking her from their pay roll. Thereupon, Bill Van Wormer arose. He had a suggestion. Didn't wish to force it upon them; but it was mighty important. Why wouldn't it be possible to contrive some way to keep Miss Brown — the nurse — in Hillport permanently? Not only had her pleasing personality and devotion to her work endeared her to all, but there was always more or less sickness in the town. If the nurse could be kept on the job, she would be an educative force, a kind of perpetual-motion health campaign. And he, as a member of the school board, kind of felt responsible for the people's education, even outside school hours. To be sure, it would cost something; but epidemics cost still more. The village had always had epidemics of grip or measles or such like about every so often. Which didn't seem necessary at all, if only the health of the people and the sanitary conditions in the town could be kept up to snuff all the time.

Aunty Agnes clapped her hands for very joy at the proposal. "Oh, if the rest of you could only know," said she, "the unhealthy habits in some of the homes I visit on my library rounds! And it's no use preaching at them. The only time to reach them is when some one is sick in the

house. A nurse at such a time could get right in on the inside, and in three days impart hygiene inspiration enough to last the rest of their natural lives."

Cushman looked over to where his wife and Mrs. Corbin were whispering together. "The expense! Ladies, how about the budget? Any possibility of adding to it?"

"We were just talking of that," spoke up Mrs. Corbin. "We believe we can raise the money." So the nurse was given a week's vacation on pay, while a committee appointed at the meeting that night canvassed the situation. At the end of the week word was sent to Miss Brown to come back. She did so and became the village nurse, the Neighbourhood Association guaranteeing her salary. The women had worked out a plan whereby a "rummage sale" was to be held annually to gather the necessary funds. And Mrs. Corbin's optimism, "We believe we can raise the money," has now been justified. Each fall, usually in Al Becker's barn across the bridge by the millpond, the sale, lasting a week, is held. For a fortnight previous a wagon, all a-flaunt with turkey-red calico, traverses the "colony," gathering up used garments. Suits, dresses, hats, shoes, underlinen, load the creaky cart, with now and then a piece of furniture, kitchen article, or

miscellaneous ware which has outlived its usefulness in that particular house.

Word is then sent, by post card and placard, to all the people. So that when Becker's barn finally throws open its huge wing-doors, many are the buyers present. Tony and his "Eyetalians" are usually among the earliest arrivals. "Getta the good stuff, first pick," one of them explained, in spreading notice of the sale to his fellow countrymen in an adjoining town and stressing the importance of an early entry on the scene. Each evening sees some entertainment feature, with a huge barn dance for the closing night. In this way about \$800 is realized yearly for Hillport's village nurse, the balance being met by the fees paid her. No family in need of her services is compelled to pay; nor is this easement put on a charity basis. It is explained to all that sickness is often a community affair as to its cause, and always a community affair as to its possibilities and results; therefore its burden should be a community affair as well. But in no instance since the village nurse was established in Hillport has she tended a patient, how poor soever, without having been offered something in the way of payment.

Since the second year, an extension of the work has been instituted. It came in unexpected

fashion. One day Miss Brown, in her office in a room set apart for that purpose in the clubhouse and where a telephone keeps her in touch with her patients and the community, was called up by "Old Man Blake." He said his rheumatism was playing the devil with him once more; Doc Rivenburg was worse than useless; wouldn't she come and do something or other? She went. But when she got there apparently the pain had subsided, because as she prepared to massage the offending ankle he said, "Never mind; it's better now; but charge me up for a visit just the same." Then in some way they got to talking about Hillport. Miss Brown told Blake about her visits in the homes of the people. Parenthetically she spoke of the lack of facilities.

"It's enough at times to sadden one," said she. "Do you know, Mr. Blake, I sometimes think it is just at this point that life in a country district presents one of its most irritating handicaps. Sick and wounded people, to a certainty, have at present a better chance in the city than in the rural regions. In the city they have the hospital, equipped with all that science has added to the sum of human comfort and safety. And there are cases where that extra margin spells all the difference between life and death. Nor can we always carry our patient into the city for treat-

ment. Those who need it most are usually the ones who are too sick for the trip."

Old Blake hobbled around on his crutches, gruff as ever. But it was noticed that he kept the subject going. As she was going, she thanked Mr. Blake for showing so much personal concern in her work. And expressed a wish that others in the town would take as much interest as did he. 'Twould give her new heart.

"Pshaw!" grunted Old Man Blake. "I'm not taking any personal interest. Just had you up here for a pastime. Nothing else. You see, my girl Janet is away on a long visit with a friend of hers, abroad. And I got sort of lonesome. And then, too, I wanted to set eyes on that new village nurse the people were talking about. By-bye! I'll send for you again when I'm in need of some one to talk to."

The next day Doctor Rivenburg was called to the Blake villa and stayed some time in talk with him. The result was that three weeks from that time to a day, there were unloaded in the freight house opposite the Hillport depot, some packing cases and crates crammed with the very latest surgical instruments and health appliances. There was an oxygen cylinder, a wheel chair, an assortment of crutches, two air mattresses, air cushions of various designs, sick-bed necessities, a surgical

chair-table for smaller operations, a sterilizing apparatus, and a score of other things which only a doctor could have thought of, but which at some critical moment of sickness or an accident are worth their weight in fine gold. These, when arranged in Miss Brown's "sick supplies room," made an impressive exhibit of the advance of science in ameliorating the ills of life.

Galusha Blake paid the bill. He tried to keep his part in it silent, but it came to light this time. I say "this time," because now it was discovered that he had been the mysterious donor of the money to clean up the bridge approach three years before; also of the fund whose endowment was the annual prize for residential betterment.

"Oh, Mr. Blake, it's so good of you," exclaimed Mrs. Frisbie to him one day, as he was in his automobile in front of the butcher shop. "I knew that Parson Dagner and the work the church and all the other agencies are doing, would change those old hard thoughts you used to have."

"Nothing of the sort," he snorted, "nothing of the sort. I'm not kind-hearted one whit. It isn't charity at all, this thing I'm trying to help along. It's business, nothing else; a hard dollar-and-cents affair, that's what it is. I just can't afford to have my home located in a community such as this one used to be some years ago."

The disclosure of his identity and the consequent uselessness of any further concealment, seemed to remove a clog which had been damming up a swelling impulse of benevolence; for Old Man Blake now went further still. One day he sent word to the Neighbourhood Association that he would like to enter his name for membership, and inasmuch as he was not much of a gad-about, wouldn't they hold their next meeting at his house? They did. Thereupon Blake addressed them, in his usual bluff tones. Why didn't they get busy and do things? To be sure they had accomplished some work that was worth while, but it wasn't enough. Education was needed, and by means of popularizing, up to-date appliances, too. Here was Miss Brown and Aunty Agnes and George Dagner a-running their legs off to reach and teach the community, but without results anywhere near in proportion. Why? Because the association was old-fogy. Anybody with brains would know that the way to teach the people was by the picture method; and the moving picture is the invention that turns the trick. But it mustn't be left in commercial hands; it must be seized as a public-education tool of enormous possibilities. Therefore, he would give \$5,000 for a plant, and turn it over to them rent free, if the association would run it.

Would they? Hendrick was on his feet before the last words were out. "Precisely the thing we've been in quest of," he exclaimed; "it will give the boys and girls a place to go at night."

"And we can teach them by pictures the stories of English Literature," put in Auntie Agnes.

"And all the rich Bible themes, too," added Dagner; "and possibly some of the great songs."

"And the care of plants and fruit and vegetables," put in Bert Re Qua. "The Farm Products Company has got to have a better grade of stuff, that's all there is to it; and that means better educated growers."

"There's one department you are all forgetting," said Doctor Rivenburg, pointing to Miss Brown; "and it seems to me, from what Hillport has just come out of, it's more important now than all these other things put together. The moving picture, with microscope attachment, is being developed as a scientific apparatus to record and project the processes of germ life; so that one can teach health by means of it, as by no other method."

The opening night of the Hillport Moving Picture Lyceum was a notable affair. An unused store on Main Street had been fitted over; and was equipped with a moving picture outfit of the highest-grade, no expense having been spared to get the most improved and perfected machine

on the market. True to the idea of making the thing partly self-supporting, admission was charged even on this initial occasion. A manager-operator had been secured on salary, and the films selected were of an educative character. The demand for pictures of this species is not so great as for the amusement description; their rental therefore was found to cost more. Blake's endowment made the higher standard possible. Moreover, as Corbin remarked to Hendrick that night, the establishment of educational halls such as this would create a demand for films of the more serious sort and bring their expense constantly down.

Two of the "reels" on this occasion were particularly applauded. One of them was entitled, "The Murderous Foe, or Why Johnny Should Swat the Fly." The crawling of a fly over a dinner plate, and leaving a trail of typhoid bacilli in its wake, is in real life an unimpressive spectacle. But on this night the picture of the fly in that death-disseminating business, magnified a thousand diameters so that he looked on the screen as big as a cat, and each filthy footprint like the splatterings of a whitewash brush, was followed by the youngest with an intentness that got hygiene under his skin quite unbeknown to him.

But more successful still was the one, "How

Peter Outwitted the Skeeter." Every summer Hillport had been visited with mosquitoes. Attempts to interest the people in covering with oil all stagnant waters had been but partly prosperous, due to the inertia of the human breast. This night the moving picture displayed a mosquito's life-history. A female was shown laying eggs in the water. They became larvæ, and, as "wrigglers" were shown sporting in a pool. Finally they swam to the surface, floated there, growing] the while, then arose into the air on their new-born wings and flew away. But look! A chap named Peter comes along. From a can which he carries he coats the surface of the water with crude oil. And now observe. The "wrigglers" once more are gaily swarming the pool. They proceed as formerly to wend their way to the surface. But now they find a barrier there, blocking their egress to the air. Against the oil coating as against a barricade they bump their heads in an attempt to break through. But in vain. Suffocating, growing desperate, they try again and again, each time with fainter stroke. They falter, drop their heads, they die. And one by one they settle through the water limp and lifeless to a grave at the bottom.

"Gee! I'll get out the oil can to-morrow," said little John Hollenbeck as they were going home that evening.



CHAPTER XIII



I WAS the typhoid epidemic which accomplished Pete Mattice's conversion to the "New Idea" movement in Hillport. Pete's boy, Henry, when the plague spread, was among the first to be stricken. The village nurse, Miss Brown, offered her services. But the dad wouldn't hear to it. She, as community nurse, was a product of the Neighbourhood Association, and though Pete's rancour toward that association had been much mollified of late, jealousy was yet operative — and also that old fear lest he lose his political boss-ship. Therefore he sent back word

to Miss Brown: "Thank you just the same, but the boy's mamma can take care of him very comfortably."

But the boy's mamma wasn't able to take care of him either as comfortably or as safely as the dad had announced. Henry grew constantly sicker, and Doctor Rivenburg's face constantly longer until one afternoon, with the fever around 105, the doctor lost his temper. He told Pete — with words a bit sulphurous, so it is reported — that he didn't propose to be alone on this case a day longer; that he was going to send Miss Brown at once. And if Pete wouldn't receive her, then let him hunt up another doctor.

Miss Brown arrived, took charge of the sick chamber without asking the dad's permission, and ended by becoming the main prop of the family, Pete leaning upon her trained skill and knowledge, most of all. It was a fight royal, the struggle to keep Henry from passing. For the coming of the nurse had been too long deferred. But Miss Brown threw herself into it with all her powers. She brought into use her utmost skill, and the appliances of modern science. Day and night she worked over him, keeping the fever within bounds by means of ice baths. At last the crisis came — and passed — and Doctor Rivenburg pronounced the boy out of danger.

The first person Pete called on, when he could leave his boy's bedside, was John Corbin. It was on a Saturday, the day Corbin did not go in to his office in the city. Pete found him, out by the front hedge, snipping a straggling growth here and there:

"You didn't expect to see me. Guess I'm something of a stranger hereabouts. Yes, it's the first time I've been out here to your place. Fact is, John Corbin, I've been forty-seven different kinds of a jackass, and I've come to tell you so. You and your Neighbourhood Asssociation, by getting a trained nurse into this town, have saved my boy's life. The Neighbourhood Association, mind you, that I've been fighting, like a drivelling idiot, ever since it started. Here's my hand, John Corbin, if you'll take it. And I want to become a member."

Pete tells even yet of the hearty clasp Corbin gave him; and of the talk they had together that Saturday afternoon, the while they took a long walk down the road. Perceiving that his boy was still a painful subject with the father, Corbin turned the conversation into impersonal channels. He drew Mattice out concerning his work as road commissioner, and the upshot of their walk that September afternoon was not only a new member added to the Neighbourhood Associa-

tion, but an enthusiastic convert to the cause of good roads. So hearty indeed was Mattice's conversion to the latter cause, that it was only a few weeks later when he put into operation a system whereby now every stretch of highway in the township is under the supervision of some volunteer who makes inspection regularly and, map in hand, marks the spots that need mending, and reports to the commissioner. In this way the roads in Hillport are watched constantly. And, while their condition is better, the repair bill is less than before, because now the bad places are discovered betimes, and are fixed before the elements have had a chance to get under and rip things up.

Pete's entrance into the association, however, while a happiest event, brought by no means a pacificating factor. Mattice, whatever his faults, was a natural-born leader, and now this native forcefulness of the man had not long to wait to disclose itself. The occasion was over the "waterworks question."

A sharp lesson had been taught by the typhoid visitation, namely, the need, in the words of the hygiene expert, of "scientific cleanliness." Therefore, as soon as the plague was over, it was seen that the mind of the people was prepared for a forward step of some magnitude. As to what

this step should be, two factions in the association emerged.

One faction, led by Hal Cushman, said that the thing of all others to do was to clean up the millpond. Not only was it an unsightly mess, visible from the railroad and close up to the village, but it was in the highest degree unhygienic. Its swampy borders, now that the dam was out, were an ideal breeding place for insects, which, as Hillport had learned to her cost, are disease carriers. Further still, Cushman pointed out that by repairing the dam and reflooding the area as in the old time, water-power might be developed.

The other faction — with Pete a leading spirit — contended that though the millpond was certainly a community disgrace, Hillport's prime need was a pure-water supply. Lack of that had been the cause of the typhoid's entrance into the village. And, so long as the people had to depend upon creeks and wells, there could be no security against another visitation. Moreover, Mattice pointed out the value of waterworks, in fire protection. The burning of Frisbie's barn some weeks before had thrown a scare into the town, because the village hand-engine had broken down square in the midst of the burning. And had it not been in a wet season when the wells were full and permitted bucket lines, there is no telling

where the fire might not have extended. This fire argument carried the day. The association voted "Waterworks, for Hillport." Voted it unanimously, in fact, because Cushman took his defeat with grace, and, once the vote was announced, threw himself into Mattice's measure

The source of the water-supply that was finally determined upon was Dogtown Brook. Not a promissory name for a pure-water system. And truth is, the stream flowed through an inhabited region where the possibilities of pollution were present. But with a sand-bed filter added, Dogtown Creek was adopted, and this with the advice of the sanitary consulting engineer. "No matter from what region you get your water," he had said, "the danger of contamination will ever be absent, particularly in a section like yours, where people are moving in ever more thickly. Patrol a watershed never so faithfully, pollutions will evade you and seep in. Sand filtration is the best patrol."

The work was financed by an issue of village bonds. A private company had sent in a representative, offering to build the waterworks as a financial investment. But, through the efforts of the association, the village turned down the offer and voted to do the work itself. When the plant was completed, Hillport found itself in posses-

sion of a water-system owned in full, and whose water, thanks to the sand field through which it had been made to flow, came forth from the faucet clear and sweet. "A draught fit for a king," as Mrs. Corbin put it, one day; but Mattice corrected her. "Fit for an American citizen," said he.

Thereupon Pete returned in fine fashion the favour to Cushman. At one of the meetings of the association he moved that a committee be appointed to report a practicable plan for improving Hillport's millpond. The motion prevailed, and Cushman and he were appointed. They got busy, and some weeks later brought back the report that the millpond renovation was already under way; and that the association moreover would not be called upon for a penny. It came to pass in this way.

Al Becker, whose farm extended down to the water's edge on the farther side, was owner of the pond and the abandoned mill-site. His interest in it was purely to get water for his cattle. The Hillport Farm Products Company, on the other hand, was in need of a plant for the manufacture of its shipping boxes.

"What's the use," said Bert Re Qua, the manager, "of turning all of this wood-box business over to a mill in another town? If Hillport can raise produce, it ought to have enterprise enough to

make the boxes in which to ship that produce." Therefore an offer for the dam and site was made to Becker, who accepted it without much dicker-ing, particularly as the flooding of the pond would give his stock more and better water than before.

The Farm Products Company, once it had got title, set to. The dam was rebuilt. In repairing the mill, it was found that the old overshot wheel was still serviceable. At Mrs. Corbin's suggestion the part of the building which housed in this waterwheel was torn away, leaving the picturesque sight visible. No less than three purchases of Hillport real estate by city folk have already been traced to interest first aroused by the view of that waterwheel, by passengers on the railroad. And even the most unæsthetic mollusk in the town learned the lesson that civic beauty is a commercial asset.

While the dam was repairing, Hendrick proposed to the company that the silt and weeds in the old pond-bottom be cleaned out before the water was turned in, to make a cleaner-looking body of water. But the company did not feel equal to additional expense. So Hendrick proposed that the association turn out in a body and clean up the pond while it was yet dry. This jumped with the humour of the meeting. They voted to hold a "Dig Day." Hal Cushman, who,

as foreman of the tree-planting squad along the railroad some years before, had distinguished himself, was sought for this job also. But he was West on a business trip. Therefore Brandon Barie was impressed into the position. Brandon accepted, making it a provision that no paid substitutes this time be accepted.

"A little play now and then ought to be relished by the busiest men," he said. "Any person so immersed in the money struggle that he can't take one day off — let him keep his sordid gains."

"Dig Day" was a wondrous affair. By common consent, Hillport — villagers and city colony alike — made it a holiday and gathered at the millpond. Farmers brought teams of horses; with some a plough, some a dirt scraper, some a wagon. There were wheelbarrows, pickaxes, spades, and shovels. Boys and men came in old clothes; the girls and women, with the midday lunch. And Brandon Barie, in blue flannel shirt and top boots, superintending the whole.

To tell the truth, there wasn't much superintending. There didn't need to be. Everybody knew that the one thing needful was to dig out dirt from the pond area, and get it over to where the banks were marked out; and they set to it with vim. The unselfish work of the Neighbourhood Association had begotten a new, a com-

munity sense in the people. To be forwarding a task in whose benefit all were to share, was tonic. It put a new and strange zest into the thing. Some dug, because a deeper pond would mean better fishing. The boys pitched in, to make a swimming-hole. The girls added their exhortations, with skating prospects in vision. All lent their best energies.

So much so, that Foreman Barie's embarrassment was to keep the spirits of the people down within limits of efficiency. The workers were too numerous for the job, and they trod upon each other; but they did make the dirt move. The only approach to unpleasantness the day long was an altercation between O'Flaherty the expressman, and Tony Rebito. Tony had been appointed superintendent of the dumping, and had tried to tell O'Flaherty, who was driving his team, where he was to dump the dirt. The latter had his own ideas on the subject. The contention might have become heated had not Barie intervened, deciding in Rebito's favour. O'Flaherty took his defeat with good spirits. "You win, Tony; you win. I'll dump where you say. But it does hurt me to take orders from a damned Dago."

Peter Mattice, as president of the Products Company, pretended to scold when the day was

done. He said it would take no end of labour to straighten up the old pond, so outrageously had it been gashed and mangled. But he was glad, notwithstanding, to have a bigger supply of water to run the mill. Even as it is, in dry weather the mill has had to reduce its running time; but they have learned now to take advantage of flood times, to saw up a supply of materials to last through the drought season.

The clean-up of the millpond had a noticeable effect on the æsthetic spirit of the community. Despite all efforts to stimulate village beauty, that mudhole square in the town's centre had been a depressing agency. Now, with its full banks planted with shrubbery, its deep waters, renovated mill, and dripping waterwheel, the thing had become an addition to the landscape. It stirred a zest of civic art in the people. The educative effect of the yearly prize for residence-betterment also began to show effects, and the piping of water to the houses made horticulture possible to a degree not attainable before. A village ordinance gave free water to fountains, and four residences put a water-spray into their front yards the same year the ordinance was passed.

So vast was the change toward community pride, it was naught less than atmospheric. A campaign was started. The slogan, "Hillport

"Shall Be Beautiful" was printed on post cards, displayed in great letters on placards, projected on slides in the moving picture lyceum. So real an enlargement of community consciousness took place that a town plan had been charted, with a districting of the village whereby the streets are from henceforth to be planted, each with one species of tree, to secure mass effect. The maple has been chosen for Main Street, and already that thoroughfare is nine tenths planted; with the other tenth to follow shortly, as soon as the association feels rich enough to dig up some elms still on Main Street and remove them to Wells Avenue, which is the street set apart for the elm.

This mass-effect idea has received in Hillport of late a still more extraordinary development. Nothing less, in fact, than the establishment of a community flower — the rosebush. With Mrs. Hal Cushman the suggestion originated. It seems that she had been cherishing the idea for long. Indeed, that had been her motive when she made the fight and got the rose selected as the plant that should adorn the screen shutting Shantytown from the railroad. For some years she kept the plan undisclosed, until it was noticed that on the Cushman estate and in their greenhouse almost nothing but roses were grown; and

also, that she had been for several seasons distributing rosebush slips to the villagers, wherever she could get one to accept them.

At one of the meetings of the association her partiality for the rose happened to be mentioned, whereupon she owned up.

"Why wouldn't it be advantageous," she asked, "if the town should adopt some one flower — the rose *par excellence* — as its community emblem and specialty? It would give the village an individuality. To be distinguished, a community must be distinct. Personality has been found, with people, an asset of no mean value. Why can't villages have a personality also?"

Some of those present, favouring the idea, asked how it could be done. Did Mrs. Cushman propose to induce people to specialize on the rose, by offering a bounty?

"No," said she, "I don't believe we'll need to bribe the people any longer. They are awakened now. We'll just put the idea before them, and trust to their sense."

This was done, and her prognostic came to pass. "Hillport, the Rose Village," took with the people. That plant has become, in the horticultural line, the community's pride and splendour. Roses are everywhere, and of all colours and descriptions. Tea roses and hybrid perpetuals are

in the dooryards; old-fashioned moss roses clamber over the doorways; climbing roses trail the fences; there are hedges and huge clumps of rugosa roses; the American Beauty is everywhere. To be sure, something of variety has been sacrificed by this concentration on one plant; but there is not a resident of Hillport, I guess, who will not declare the loss to have been more than counterpoised by the gain.

Decidedly there is a chord within us that is struck only by mass effect. Colour, if in big enough splashes, will impress the stolidest nature, whereas that same amount of colour, scattered, would have passed him by unstirred. Of this strain in our psychology Hillport has taken advantage. By centering on the rose, she has made its beauty to bulk so vast that no one of her inhabitants is so loggish as not to have caught the vision. Roses trail the banks of the railroad and the fences thereof, long before the train has come to the depot. The station receives the visitor in a bower of roses, overhead, in front, behind, on every side. The merchants along Main Street have concerted a scheme of window boxes, with the rose as the chief flower therein. The banks of the millpond are gay with rugosas. The mill itself is overrun with the trailing splendour. Dooryards along every street abound with it. Even the telegraph and

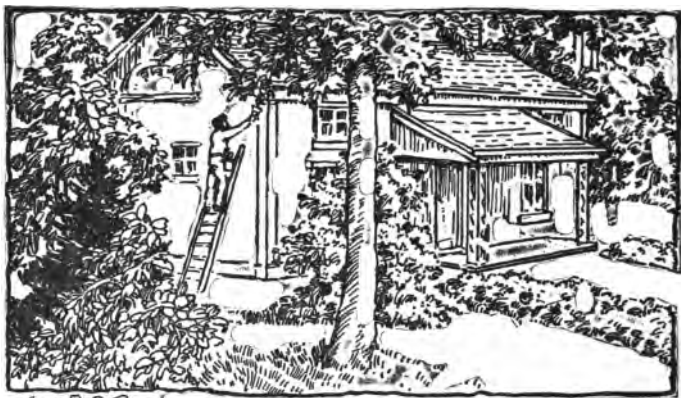
telephone poles have clambering roses to garb their nakedness.

So greatly has the town specialized on this plant, that the people have become expert in growing it and in perfecting new species. The books of the Farm Products Company would, I suspect, show that orders for rose plants form no inconsiderable part of the annual sales. Visitors motor in from miles around to see the sight. From the middle of May, clear into October, the town is all lit up with the gorgeousness.

"This town is the American Beauty for sure," remarked one of these visitors one day. And I am not sure, with the spring gayety around me as I write, but the words were merited.

"I don't mean to be facetious," said Hal Cushman one morning, as a party of them were walking home from church. It was in mid-June, when the splendour was at its height. Dagner had been preaching that morning from the text. "Sharon — the Loveliest Among Ten Thousand." "I don't mean to be facetious," said Cushman, waving his hand in a scopeful sweep, "but, having watched the drift of things in this town for some years now, I state that if there is a village with a rosier outlook, I want to be shown."

"Oh, Hal Cushman!" said his wife, and joined in the general merriment.



CHAPTER XIV



One morning Mrs. Corbin had a visit from Mrs. Hal Cushman. Mrs. Corbin, with greetings, asked her to be seated on the piazza by the dining-room side of the house. But Mrs. Cushman, making known that she wished to speak out of earshot of the maids, took her off into an arbour seat. There the two women reposed themselves, and Mrs. Cushman told of the thing that was on her mind.

She had been making some money, it seems, by selling fruit from their place. She had saved it, and now wished to put it to some use for Hillport.

"I saved it little by little," she explained. "I had an iron barrel safe, and put all of the credit slips in there, as they came. I really didn't need the money for my own use. And Hal said it was mine to do with as I thought best. So I decided to accumulate it, and then use it in some way for the community. In fact, it doesn't belong to us by right, but to Hillport, because this fruit formerly went to waste, there being no way to market it. Now the community has provided a channel whereby this fruit which once rotted on the ground can reach the consumer, profiting us who grow it, and them that eat it. Therefore, the money should go back into the community."

"Sumptuously conceived!" cried Barbara Corbin, grasping Mrs. Cushman's hand. "And in what way do you propose to put it to work?"

"That's just what I'm here for," said the other. "Listen!" — and she glanced around to make sure no other ears were within radius — "I have a plan. And oh, it's the craziest ever heard of! I haven't dared to breathe it even to Hal. But it's a good one just the same," she added, with serious mien. "Barbara, had you ever thought that houses in a country village ought always to be painted white? Amid a setting of green in the dooryard, against a mass of greenery for the background, and peeping through green foliage, white is the only colour."



"And, too, by having a village painted in one solid colour," put in Mrs. Corbin, beginning to kindle to the idea, "we'd have that mass-effect once more which is so important for landscape art. And it would do away with the horrid jumble of colours that now disfigure the village. Yes, and also," and she glowed more and more, as the enthusiasm gained upon her, "that community colour would beget a neighbourhood consciousness; would bind the people by subtle strands of psychology, all the more powerful because operating unconsciously. But," and her face suddenly sobered, "how could it be done? The people would never consent. To pick out the colour for his house is one of the last prerogatives that an American citizen would surrender. In that point at least his individuality insists on self-assertion."

"That's just where my plan comes in," said Mrs. Cushman, under her breath. "I couldn't hand the money over to the people direct, for them to buy white paint. They wouldn't take it, in the first place; nor get that colour. But listen! Your husband knows Mr. Halford, of that paint firm in the city of Smith, Halford & Co. You remember, he was visiting at your house one Fourth of July. Well, if we could — because, you see, that money I've saved, with the interest

accumulating, amounts now to a real sum; oh, a number of hundred dollars — and ——”

Mrs. Corbin burst into a laugh whose merriment rang out across the garden: “Kate Cushman, you’re a genius! Nothing less, upon my word.” And thereupon, through the space of half an hour, whisperings, with much suppressed laughter, could have been heard coming from that arbour.

“Dan,” said Mrs. Frisbie to her husband one evening across the supper table, in their home on Main Street, “I see that Bassler’s store is offering white paint at twenty-five cents a gallon.”

“A dollar-twenty-five,” corrected her husband, helping himself to a second glass from the butter-milk pitcher.

“No, it was twenty-five,” insisted his wife. “I saw the sign.”

“But, my dear! You women have no sense of figures. Don’t you know that the white lead alone in a gallon of paint costs more than twenty-five cents to manufacture? Say nothing about the oil and the labour, and the retailer’s profit.”

“But what if he was making a special run on that article? For I saw it, I’m just as sure as I am that ——”

“Now, look here,” spoke up her husband, irritated at her persistence, “you get that paint if

you can at twenty-five cents a gallon, and send the bill to me. There's no other way to teach women an idea of values, except to put them right up against it in business fashion. Get all you want of it at that figure. We'll paint the house, barn, chicken coop — every splinter of wood on the plantation. You never bought a pint of paint in your life. Whereas I've bought enough during my lifetime to drown a horse. Guess I ought to know what paint costs." And he resumed his eating.

The next night on returning home he found the doorstep loaded with cans of paint.

"What's this?" said he. He had forgotten the conversation of the evening before.

"The paint," said his wife.

"At that twenty-five-cent figure?" he shouted, recollection suddenly returning to him. "You mean that you actually could buy ——" Then his face wreathed itself in smiles. "Well, all I can say is, Welly Bassler made a mistake. And it's our gain. We'll take the paint at that figure. Wasn't planning to paint for a couple of years yet. Still, it won't do the house any harm. It's beginning to peel in places. But why did you pick out white? Never mind that, though. You can exchange it in the morning. But at the same figure, mark you. Business is business. Hold him to his bargain."

His wife explained that she had tried to get other colours, but that the low figure was quoted only on white paint.

"Hum!" mused Mr. Frisbie, and his face went a shade or two cloudy; "I was counting on painting the house this next time pink, with orange trimmings, and the blinds a rich brown; perhaps with some lavender and yellow on the lattice-work of the piazza, to sort of set the thing off. It would have made the showiest house in town. But still, white is better than nothing; and, maybe, for a change won't be so bad."

Reader, multiply that scene transpiring under the peace of the Frisbie roof by a hundred, and you'll get a picture of what happened in Hillport that spring when Bassler's store displayed the sign: "White Paint! Best Quality! Twenty-five cents a gallon!"

"But, Welly, how can you do it?" asked Pete Mattice as he carried home a couple of pails of it. "Bankrupt sale?"

Bassler didn't know. All he could say was that the drummer from the paint firm of Smith, Halford & Co. had come out and made a special offer.

"It's only for Hillport, it seems," Bassler added. "Because I'm forbidden to sell any of it at this figure except to my regular customers, and for use here in this locality."

"You say it's only in one special colour you could get that figure?" asked Pete, and his face betokened intense thought the while.

"Yes," replied Bassler. "I tried. Because, as I told the drummer, our people here are partial to fancy colours."

"Well," remarked Pete, when his mental operations were completed, "I think I see through it. That paint-house in the city is experimenting with some new process of manufacture, and wish to try it out. So they've selected one town, Hillport, far enough out in the country so no harm will be done. But, if I know good paint when I see it, this is an A No. 1 product. And Hillport better get busy and snap up this bargain while she's got the chance." Thereupon he went his way to tell everybody the discovery he had made, and to urge people to paint their houses while the bargain lasted.

Indeed, so great was the demand upon Smith, Halford & Co. that Mr. Halford of that firm 'phoned out to a certain woman in Hillport stating that he would absolutely have to have another check. He explained that his house was charging to itself on its books only a manufacturer's rate for this particular paint it was furnishing. The deficit would have to be made up outside or shipments would have to cease. The shipments did

not cease. The Cushman place in Hillport, by some coincidence, just at this time went into the marketing business somewhat extensively. Moreover, it has more than doubled its berry and fruit acreage of late; so that it ships to market a surprising amount. Each spring, Bassler's store makes a special run on white paint. And the figure is so attractive that the people are repainting their houses each year. Whereby the village is becoming a symphony of white, in a setting of nature's green.

"I see now how it is," remarked Dan Frisbie to Mrs. Cushman one day, as they met at the express office. "Maybe you never stopped to think of it, but white is the only colour for village houses. I didn't use to think so. And for this reason: the white houses I used to see had been painted usually three or four years before. And, of course, white gets dingy quicker than other colours, and looks bad. But when repainted every season like we do now — say, isn't it good for sore eyes to see a whole village glistening white? It gives a place such a clean look. And really doesn't cost so much. You see, white paint has no colouring matter, as the other colours have. Therefore it comes an immense sight cheaper. Why, do you know, I've figured it up and find I save eight or ten dollars a year by using white paint instead of

colours." She agreed heartily. And thereupon sold him four barrels of Baldwin apples to be delivered in the fall.

Even Shantytown caught the infection. Tony Rebito said nothing when the Neighbourhood Association built the high rose screen along the entire length of the depot, shutting out a view of Shantytown from the railroad. But he felt the humiliation: "Me live in a house so fall-to-pieces noboda likea to look at it!" And it hurt him.

Now Rebito was a larger property owner than people knew. Not for nothing had he lived these years frugally, years of toil unceasing. He had invested all of his savings in Shantytown, until now he owned nearly that whole section, the only exceptions being the homes owned by individual Italians, who had no wish to sell. Therefore, when the humiliation of that screen was inflicted upon him, he got busy — not to complain; no. That would have accomplished nothing. Besides, Tony recognized the justice of it. Shantytown in its present shape was not presentable, and should be screened from view.

He set to work to make it presentable. He employed a carpenter to put the buildings into first-class repair. Tore down one or two, and moved several of them slightly, so as to make some

harmony of arrangement. Also he had a general clean-up time, and impressed upon each tenant that neat premises were a part of the rent contract. In the dooryards he sowed grass seed, and set out some rosebushes. Also he planted some shade trees, and replaced a plank crossing a creek there with a bridge of stone and cement. Then when the white-paint fever struck the town, he caught it also. Painted Shantytown throughout. This was all done gradually, so that Hillport was hardly aware that anything was in process. The village people seldom or never visited the spot. Moreover, the high screen completely shut it from sight. Now and then one would remark that Shantytown seemed to be "fixing up a little." But no attention was paid to it. Behind that screen Tony had quietly conducted his campaign, until the white paint had completed the operation.

Then, one night that a high wind was blowing, the screen along the railroad fell down. (Some say that Tony and his men dug the dirt away from around the posts and so permitted the wind to topple it over. No one knows to a certainty how it happened.) When Hillport awoke the next morning, it rubbed the sleep from its eyes with astonishment. There before its gaze stretched a renewed and glorified Shantytown. The houses stood in some regularity. Door-

yards were green — and tended. A fresh coat of white adorned the buildings. And a neatly trimmed path of gravel led from the station thither.

To erect the screen into its former uprightness was not to be thought of. It was left in a half-recline over which the roses clambered in rich profusion, and invited the eye to the roses and greenery and whiteness that now stretched where these citizens from the lemon-tree land abided. It was Bert Re Qua that gave the place its new name.

“Here comes Tony of Tonyville,” said he one evening as Rebato stepped into the office to see about buying some stock in the Farm Products Company. The name took at once. “Shantytown” was no longer applicable. “Tonyville” it became, and “Tonyville” it remained, until the place became finally so amalgamated into the rest of Hillport that a separate name was no longer needed.



CHAPTER XV

But

though "Tonyville" was a pride to its owner, and materially elevated him in the estimation of the entire countryside, Rebito's troubles were by no means ended.

One evening Martin O'Flaherty rushed into the post office as the people were waiting for the night mail to be distributed. He was in a vast state of agitation, and he poured out his complaint to all who would listen. He had gone home that evening, it seems, and had discovered — whom do you think? — Tony Rebito sitting on his front door-stoop and talking with his

daughter Nora! He, Martin O'Flaherty, citizen of standing in the town of Hillport, and superintendent of transportation for the kindergarten children — the darlints! — that he should be insulted in open fashion like that! Sitting on his front stoop, mind you! Right in broad daylight, too! For Tony Rebuto to think that a daughter of Martin O'Flaherty would have anything to do with a Dago! The impudence of that black-skinned foreigner! Why, she'd spurn even to let the soles of her feet rest upon him! For the O'Flahertys have always held their head high, sir.

"The O'Flaherty, from County Cork, sir, and I don't care who knows it. Self-estimation, sir, has always been a point in our family, sir. And for that Dago to step foot inside my dooryard — not my dooryard by legal title, perhaps, I grant you that, sir. But I pays the rent, and every month, too. Regular as the moon. The O'Flahertys, sir, always pay their bills — as soon as they get the money, sir, always. And for that forinner to presume to come inside my gate and sit on my stoop! Why, they were holding hands! As true as my name is Martin O'Flaherty! That is, he had taken her hand. And they were singing something or other together. Crooning a tune I never heard before. Why ——"

Plainly, Martin O'Flaherty was incoherent.

And the bystanders were at a loss to puzzle out the thing.

"Why didn't you tell him to go?" asked Bill Van Wormer.

"I did. And he wouldn't. He started in to talk with me right then and there."

"Well, then, why didn't you simply tell Nora to come in with you? Then you could have closed the door and left him to sit there to his heart's content."

"That's what I tried to do," said O'Flaherty, "and she wouldn't come. She spoke up, too, just like Tony did. Sir, if Parson Dagner dares to marry my daughter to that Dago, I'll have the law on him, that's what I'll do. This is a free country, sir, and if a father hasn't got a right to protect his own hearthstone from insolent intrusion, then where are the boasted liberties we talk about? Oh, to think this should have come upon my gray hairs! Marry a Dago! The O'Flaherty from County Cork!" And he went out and up the street, declaring his woes.

Yes, here was a mix-up, and one that became serious, the deeper one's investigations into it extended. Because neither side would yield. Tony carried his head erect and refused to quail, even when he met O'Flaherty on the street.

"Why should Meester Tony Rebito be afraid?"

he asked, and in surprisingly fluent English, now that his associations had brought him into touch with the Hillporters and also through the practice in English that he was acquiring by singing in the choir. "I do nothing bad. I lovea Nora. Nora, she say she lovea me. Why not? She a gooda woman. I a gooda man. Make a gooda home for her. Why not? I helpa her. She helpa me. Why not?"

Nora was equally resolute.

"Yes, I love Mr. Rebito; so there!" was her reply, when questioned by the neighbours. "And if papa doesn't like it, I can't help it, that's all. Yes, I'm going to marry him. Just because he comes from a different country than you do, and whose language is different, you don't like him. That's because you don't know him. He's a perfect gentleman. So kind and gentle-natured. Why, he stopped drinking wine just because I asked him to. He's musical, and so am I. We like each other; so there!" And her blue eyes looked straight out at her questioners with a forthrightness that bespoke resoluteness in the soul behind them.

The irate father, on the other hand, was equally uncompromising. He vowed that Martin O'Flaherty's blood should never be corrupted by that foreign strain. "The O'Flaherty of County

Cork!" he insisted, with volubility. "My grand-sires in their graves would turn and tear their hair, and wash, with the tears from their eyes, my name from the family roll."

It was a case certainly for friendly intervention; if friendly intervention could be.

"Hal," said Corbin to Cushman, as they were going into the city on the train together one morning, "we neighbourhooders have got to help out that situation, in some fashion or other."

"Just what I've been thinking, too," remarked Cushman, looking up from his newspaper. "But what in blazes can we do?"

That was just it. What could be done? Corbin shook his head blankly. It was too deep for him. And he likewise buried himself in the morning paper. But not so their wives.

"Hal," said Mrs. Cushman to her husband one evening at the dinner table, "you must come back from the city early Thursday night of this week. I've invited the church choir to dinner here, and to spend the evening."

"The choir!" exclaimed her husband, in a questioning tone; but then his face relaxed, took on a quizzical look, and finally burst into a full-blown smile:

"I see, I see, I see! Kate, you're a wonderful woman. All women are wonderful, for that

matter. But some are more wonderful than others. I presume that — er — you are going to sort of have one or two of the girls' fathers to the party also; *n'est-ce pas?*”

“Now leave that to us women,” said his wife. “There are certain situations demanding finesse and the more subtle appreciation of things; situations where man is quite too clumsy to be permitted any jurisdiction.”

“I see. It's *ultra vires*. Like a rhinoceros trying to play a harp — he hasn't quite got the delicacy of touch.” And Cushman subsided into his proper insignificance.

Yes, Nora's father was one of the guests at the dinner party that night.

Mrs. Cushman extended the invitation to him in person:

“A few of the young people of the church, Mr. O'Flaherty. And I want one or two men, to keep my husband company. In fact, I've selected you to be at the head of the table and sort of do the honours. You are one of the residents of some long standing in the village, and are a splendid helper in the work of the kindergarten. Besides, you are broad in your sympathies — just the one I need.”

“Why, sure I can come, Mrs. Cushman. Me to do the honours? But don't you think that ——”

"By the way," she added, "there's another man besides you and my husband who has consented to come — Tony Rebito. I understand that there's been some little friction between you and him. But I had to invite him for my husband's sake. Mr. Cushman has sort of a hobby for those people from southern Europe, and has taken a fancy to Mr. Rebito in particular. But of course that will make no difference with you. I know that your views are broad enough to fellowship all your fellow townsmen, at least for one night."

"Oh, I can be civil, I can be civil, Mrs. Cushman, even though I may have my own private views. I'll come, and help you and Mr. Cushman entertain the young people. Bless them!"

The affair passed off with astonishing smoothness. Mr. and Mrs. Corbin were present, supplementing Mrs. Cushman's art — which was not small — as hostess. As was explained to all, it was intended to be a neighbourhood affair, even to the food. For the dishes that were served were of products grown in Hillport, which provided conversation at the start. The dishes possessed each some local interest, and so took on an added zest because of an origin personally known to the eaters. A grape cordial, iced and charged, came sparkling from siphon bottles, and made an appro-

priate beverage to grace a "grown-in-Hillport" dinner.

O'Flaherty sat at one end of the table, proud of his daughter Nora in her gown of white, a ribbon in her hair; and proud also that she should see him there, in his best raiment, at the head of so distinguished an occasion. Tony, some distance down, was seated next to Mrs. Corbin, with whom he carried on an animated conversation.

There was a little stiffness in O'Flaherty's bearing, it is true. He at first was self-conscious. But Corbin proposed "A Toast to All Nations," and began it with a toast to the English, represented by Mrs. Cushman. She came back with a toast to the Scotch, and expressed her gratitude to that country for having presented America with a citizen like John Corbin. In Bert Re Qua the French were honoured. Tony Rebito arose and with fine verve, pointing to the head of the table, proposed "A Toast to Ireland, the country of the fine men and-a the handsome women."

O'Flaherty couldn't resist a compliment like that. And his remarks in reply certainly did Old Erin proud. The German, and the Dutch — oh, yes, Hillport knew the Dutch blood — followed. Things decidedly were loosening up. Then O'Flaherty had an inspiration. He pointed out that this was a Hillport dinner. The dishes were

of home-grown products. The delicious beverage wherein they were drinking these toasts was of local origin. Why not a toast to the "grown-in-Hillport" people who were present — "these young people, the best product any community can show! May the good God bless them!" It was a finely conceived idea. And all his own, too. The people clapped their acclaim. And O'Flaherty was the proudest of mortals.

"I've got another, still," he announced, feeling at ease on his feet, now that the ice was broken and the currents of geniality had begun to flow. "Mrs. Cushman, our handsome and accomplished hostess, insisted on putting me here, at one end of so illustrious a table. I've come to help give you youngsters a good time. And now, if I'm to preside over these toasts, be gorrah! I'm going to see fair play, and nary a one shall be left out. Here's a toast to Rebato and the Land of Sunshine."

That did the trick. Like a log-jam when the key log is at last removed, so now. The thing moved with a momentum all the greater because of the tension that had previously prevailed. "Italia" was drunk, with a gusto that was unmistakable. Every one was merry, and not least, O'Flaherty himself, author of so graceful a stroke of civility, and proud of it.

Of course, after that there was no more resisting.

And the gayety was unconfined. Music bubbled from every heart. Nora and Tony and Miss Brown, the village nurse, sang a trio. Then Nora and Tony were called upon to sing a duet they had sung in church some Sundays before — a Decoration Day air, arranged from a patriotic song. They hung back. But the company was insistent. So they sang the verses. All joined in the chorus, O'Flaherty taking the lead; and, pleased to find himself in such good voice, insisted that they sing it through once more.

"By that time," as Bert Re Qua expressed it, in recounting the scene afterward, "it was all over but the shouting." And that was not long in coming. Nora and Tony were too shrewd to let so favourable a moment go by.

"Well, have it your own way, have it your own way!" exclaimed O'Flaherty. "But don't you call any of the brats Tony. Mark you that. I always did hate that name."



CHAPTER XVI



flood of life, whose visitation to Hillport wrought the things which are here related, did not forget to lave the public school with its irrigating flow. The former attempt in that direction, and the prompt quietus which at that time it received, have been told. But Corbin and the Neighbourhood Association did not permit the defeat of their candidates for the School Board to quell their determination. They knew that the school was a strategic point. Though all the residue of the town's life should be captured for the "New Idea" movement, with the school

left out, it would profit nothing. To be sure, Dagner at the village church was doing doughty deeds. Aunt Anges with her travelling library was a transporter of wisdom and intellectual zest into many homes. The brother-hand that had been reached out to the Italians in Shantytown was opening the minds of the people to a broader Americanism. The association, with its commingling of village folk and "colony" in fine and liberal democracy, was contributing to the same end. The Farm Products Company, now an assured success, was tying city consumer with Hillport the producer, and thereby was bringing to pass the latter's economic salvation. Miss Brown, as village nurse, was a hygienic dynamo let loose in the town — "radiates health at every pore," Mrs. Corbin said of her. And the spirit of civic art that was now abroad — "The Village of Whiteness and Roses" — was working nought less than æsthetic miracles. Of a truth, Hideous Hillport was going over into a Hillport industrious, beautified, vivacious.

But this wasn't enough. As John Corbin never tired of insisting, "We've got to get hold of the younglings; must shape them into a civic twist and bent whilst they're in the gristle." Of course, the young people's club, in its quarters in the old barrel factory, was doing much. But

the club operated only at the tag end of the day. The public school has the child during the best hours of the day, the best days of the week, and the best weeks of the year — years, furthermore, which are the best in every one's life, for training into community consciousness. Yes, decidedly, the school had to be captured. It was, and in unexpected fashion.

It seems that one of the first fruits of Aunt Agnes's "library on wheels" had been a young man named Edward Engle. Natively of eager and sound intelligence, he had lacked the touch of a friendly and guiding hand. He was a graduate of the public school, but thereupon had been left to stagnate. Aunt Agnes came into his life, skilfully chose the right books for him, awakened him, and so contrived it that within a year he was away to college. There he rapidly advanced, and, having graduated, was now making a place for himself as editor in a large publishing house in the city.

But Agnes Lawyer was not through with him. One summer during his vacation in Hillport she had a number of long talks with him. And when, the next spring, it was noised that — as usual — the principal of the Hillport school after a year's stay was going to a more lucrative field, she made a trip into the city and had a long and apparently

serious conference with Engle. For when she came back she summoned John Corbin and Pete Mattice to her library room in the clubhouse. There she announced that Ed. Engle had consented, if the village demanded him, to take the school, though it would mean a smaller salary than he was getting and in all likelihood the sacrifice of a life's career.

The three looked at each other for some moments in silence. Interest centred chiefly on Mattice because he, through his political control, held the school situation in the hollow of his hand. Finally Pete, looking steadily at Corbin the while, spoke up: "It's a go, on one condition."

"What's that?" eagerly asked Auntie Agnes.

"This: That John Corbin and Mrs. Dan Frisbie accept places on the School Board at the next election." Whereat Agnes Lawyer looked from one to the other of the two men, and laughed.

But Corbin didn't laugh. More deeply than the others knew, he was affected. Indeed, he had to bluster around furiously for a few minutes, and even then a tear or two leaked out. "How in blazes did people get the idea that he could give up all of his time to a poky old village like Hillport? Not if he knew it. Like to see himself be a pack mule any longer. He felt he had done his share. Let some others now take hold."

"Well, now that the bargain is settled," said Aunt Agnes, bubbling with merriment, "let's get down to business."

"Why, it's this way," said Corbin, scowling fiercely. "I'm willing to take hold of the thing. I suppose somebody has got to do it. But — and here also — on one condition. Namely, that we frame a budget big enough to give Engle exactly as much as he's getting now. On the measly pay we've been giving, it's no wonder we haven't had a permanency of tenure in the principalship. And permanency is what Hillport needs."

Engle's advent into the school did what Agnes Lawyer — and Dagner too, who had missed Engle from the church sadly when he had left the town, and now was rejoiced to have him back — had foretold. It brought a modern mind and a steadfast daring into Hillport's public school. The kindergarten was at once taken over from the Neighbourhood Association, which had been supporting it privately. Evening lectures were arranged for. A department in housewifery was created, with classes in sewing — both plain and fancy — cooking, and domestic science. Singing was added to the curriculum. The Third of July exercises which Hendrick had introduced some years before, with a huge chorus of pupils

singing patriotic songs, had proved so blessed an innovation that it had become an annual event. The vocal training of the children was now made into a regular part of the school work, running throughout the year. A kindergarten teacher was found who also gave the chorus training, and part of the housewifery lessons, while in the classes in domestic science she was assisted by Miss Brown, the village nurse, who visited the school each afternoon for a class in home hygiene.

Nor were the boys forgotten. The chestnut blight, which has been upon this whole part of the country of late, visited its depredations upon Hillport also. Beholding the chestnut wood which was thus being thrown on the market, Bert Re Qua — who was a close friend of Engle — got a woodworking class established in the school, with the result that several specialties in chestnut wood, such as scientific birdhouses, a new-designed porch chair, and a wall cabinet of Mission make, are now listed among the Farm Products Company's commodities, and are finding a widening sale. There have recently been introduced also evening classes in English, commercial book-keeping, and high school subjects.

It was not long before these additions to the work began to put pressure upon the schoolhouse

space, particularly as non-resident pupils were coming into Hillport in augmenting numbers, attracted from outlying regions by the new fame of her school. For a time it looked as though progress would have to halt for lack of housing room. But at this juncture Mrs. Barie Barie came to the rescue.

Mrs. Barie had been immeasurably grateful to the Neighbourhood Association for having delivered her son Brandon from an aimless existence and given him the enlargement and seriousness that come from an interest in civic affairs. Now she evidenced it by presenting to the town a village club house. It is a fireproof building of stucco work, two stories high and basement, and with a campanile. An idea of the artistic quality can be gained from the fact that Mrs. Barie employed three different architects before she was satisfied with the design, so resolute was she that the structure should be for all time a pacesetter to the rest of Hillport.

Into this splendid building were transferred the young people's activities which had been having their headquarters in the barrel factory. On the first floor is a room for Auntie Agnes and her library. Adjoining it is a hall for the moving picture lyceum, the two rooms so arranged as to be thrown into one if a community meeting re-

quires so big a space. The second floor is given over to club rooms, a studio and dark rooms for the camera club, and so forth.

One entire wing is set apart for Miss Brown, the nurse. Besides her living-rooms, there is an office for her and a sick supplies room, also a small dispensary for patients that need care which their homes are ill adapted to offer, and for surgical cases. There is also a guest room, for Hillport is not strong on hotels, and lecturers and similar transients were formerly put to inconvenience at times, to find a suitable habitation for the night.

The building was located across the road from the church and schoolhouse, and into it were transferred the manual training and housewifery classes. No sooner had the village club vacated the old barrel factory than the Farm Products Company moved into it, for it had some time ago outgrown its quarters on Main Street and now was only too glad to get a larger building and one directly on the railroad.

One day Mr. Hendrick came into a meeting of the School Board and asked permission to address them. John Corbin, who was presiding, pretended to look very vexed and inhospitable.

"What is this?" said he. "Some more of these people with new-fangled ideas? Merciful good-

ness, we can't let our school keep going ahead all the time; everlastingly making innovations and adopting improvements. Where would we be at if we listened to all the people who have notions in the top of their head."

"Entirely true," spoke up Ed Engle, the principal. "The purpose of the public school, as anybody knows, is to teach how to read and write, and to do sums up as far as long division. These fancy ideas of education are too advanced and high-toned. However, I wish an exception could be made in the present case, and Mr. Hendrick here be permitted to speak. With the understanding, of course, that new ideas are never welcome in the precincts of Hillport. We'll let him speak merely to get out of his system something that apparently is disquieting him." Hendrick laughed.

"I'm not here," said he, "to propose any frills and fancy notions. To the contrary, it's a hard dollar-and-cent suggestion that I wish to bring to your notice. Consolidation is the master-word in the business world, isn't it?"

They were willing to admit that it was.

"And it's because business men are finding combination to be economical; saves money, at the same time that it increases efficiency. Am I right?"

Yes, they agreed that he had stated the thing justly.

"Then," said he, "why not apply the same rule to the schools? Here you've got a union school for the village of Hillport instead of, as formerly, two district schools, at Bull's Head and down at Scribner's Lane. And it works fine. Well, why not extend that union idea? Here is the community supporting two or three weak little district schools on the outskirts of the village, with a teacher in each, ministering to no more than a handful of children. One down in The Hook, another over in Polly Holler, and a third up at The Gate."

"But the scholars couldn't walk that far," put in Corbin. "These places are two miles out, some of them more. And in winter weather, when the snow ——"

"Exactly," interrupted Hendrick. "And why not transport the children night and morning? Out West, where they are not hampered as we are by the cramp of tradition, they do it; and find it to pay. The cost of transportation is not so much as the pay of separate teachers and the upkeep of separate schoolhouses."

The Board did some figuring. Found it was as Hendrick had said. And the next season saw those three outlying district schools abandoned

and the children carried by wagon night and morning. O'Flaherty was employed to give his entire time to this work. This he could do, and continue to transport the kindergartners, because the latter did not begin school until ten o'clock in the morning; and left also an hour earlier. "Superintendent of Transportation" was the title by which he referred to himself. Nor did his joy know bounds when the School Board created him truant officer for the town, and got a nickelled badge for him to wear on his vest. I think I am warranted to say, never did public functionary enter upon his work with a more solemn elation at the grandeur of it, nor a more scrupulous fidelity in its discharge.

It took a little time to habituate the children in these outlying districts to the new régime. But they were not long in appreciating the advantages of it. Instead of a dingy schoolhouse where all were huddled into one room, under a poorly paid and usually a homesick teacher, they now were taken care of in a modern building. Not a thing to be overlooked, in human planning, is the enthusiasm of numbers. Perhaps this was the greatest single advantage conferred by the new arrangement. The gathering of the young of the entire countryside under one roof, day by day, made an assemblage multitudinous enough to

impress the imagination and create a vivid interest. School became the big fact in their lives.

School attendance on the part of these brought-by-wagon children was found to be vastly improved. O'Flaherty provided himself with a fish horn. And the sound of it in front of a house carried to sluggish children and lax parents, dawdling around the breakfast table, a peremptory mandate. Later on, O'Flaherty learned to play a tally-ho trumpet which he substituted for the tin horn, and which he sounded with infinite zest; whereby all the countryside knew that Martin O'Flaherty, official of the Board of Education, was arriving to bring schooling and culture and mental elegance into that backward and benighted region. But though the mandate was now uttered with musical intonation — and O'Flaherty attained after a time no small proficiency in winding that tally-ho horn — its call was no less mandatory than of old. For the man behind that joyous trumpet call was truant officer, mark you well; and was required, even had not his own fidelity spurred him thereunto, to make personal inquisition into every absence.

The effect of this, in regions where hitherto the school had been a meagre fact in the lives of the people, was astonishing. It carried a call to education, with an insistent note. Served notice

upon everybody that, though in previous modes of society education was a luxury and optional, in a democracy it is compulsory, the foundation indeed upon which our civil ordering reposes. But in the majority of cases this imperative note was found now to be unneeded. The children clamoured to go, so contagious was the enthusiasm of that ride, morning and evening, and of the great schoolhouse in a village filled with sights and bustle and pleasing excitement.

Still a further fact developed: This amalgamation of all the schools of the district brought the higher branches within reach of everybody. Formerly the grades above the primary and grammar school were accessible only to those who lived in the village. The single teacher in a district school is rarely capable of teaching both the alphabet to six-year-olds, and algebra to sixteen-year-olds. Therefore, out in the farming regions, the older children had been wonted to graduate from school at a miserably young and untimely age. Now the large graded school in the village, with specialized teachers and modern equipment, was brought within reach of the farms. The young men out there who had outgrown "book-learning," began to consider the advisability of resuming their studies. O'Flaherty, in his shoulder-slapping fashion, kept hammering at them:

"Come and take a ride with these other students. No young man should leave school before he's twenty. Johnny, you'll grow up to be an ignoramus, sure as you're born, if you don't get back into school; and quick, too."

Aunty Agnes in her house-to-house visitings helped along this work. But Professor Engle at the school did most of all. He introduced a football team among the boys. Did the farm lads come then? They came in such numbers, and of so advanced an age, that now the Hillport school has a special course in farming, with a teacher furnished by the State Agricultural School. He comes for three months every winter and also gives evening lectures to the grown-ups.

Let it not be supposed that the public bath was forgotten. That copious supply of hot water in the basement of the old clubhouse had fulfilled the prediction Hendrick had made: it was preventing the sense of smell from erecting itself into a barrier separating the classes and was thereby a democratizing agency of the first magnitude. For that reason the new clubhouse made provision for bathing, and on even grander proportions. In the basement, adjoining the gymnasium, was placed a swimming tank; made possible now because the town had a water supply. Also, two shower baths at the side — obligatory as a preparation for the tank — keeps

the water in the swimming bath sweet. Captain Paul here conducts in winter his lessons in natation. And now, for practically every resident of the town, bathing has ceased to be a drudgery and is elevating itself into one of the joys of life.

One of the rooms in the new clubhouse belongs to the Hillport Brass Band. Said Old Man Blake one day from his automobile to a group of young men in front of the post office: "Why in the dickens don't you good-for-nothings get up a brass band? Every village ought to have a band. You say you haven't any one to lead? Hire a man. Let him come in twice a week, until you've raised up a leader of your own. Send the bill to me; and for a set of uniforms, too. Oh, no palaver or thanks. It isn't charity. I'm doing this for myself. It's purely because I want things around me to be lively. I'll make you come up to my place next summer and blow your heads off, to pay me." A band of twenty pieces was the result.

Indeed, it is a musical building for another reason also: Mrs. Barie placed in the campanile a chime of bells. It had long been a theory with her that the cities are becoming too big and turbulent for community bells. Therefore if peals and chimes are not to pass out of existence altogether, country districts must preserve them.

Every evening at six, the chimes ring out over Hillport, and far down the bay. On Sundays they play to announce the church service, and on holidays they are a contributing force of no mean magnitude.

Mrs. Barie accompanied her gift with an offer of a \$10,000 endowment, if an equal amount would be raised. The Neighbourhood Association accepted the challenge, and raised the money. An interesting feature has been the mode of investment of this fund. It was discovered that some hill land up at the head of the village water-supply was for sale. It was forested with a second growth of trees. A lumber company was after it, planning to move in a portable mill and slaughter the half-grown timber, which would mean serious perturbation to the water-supply in summer. Also, Vleetskill Creek took part of its flow from that region, and deforestation would spell a huger freshet in spring, with a corresponding scarcity of water-power in summer.

Therefore they took the endowment fund and invested it in that timber land. By scientific forestry it is planned to realize a little something year by year, but the association is willing to see some of the present revenue diminished for the sake of the greater gain later on as the trees mature; and also to safeguard the watershed upon

which so much of the town's health and happiness depends.

Relative to that Vleetskill millpond, an affair was held a couple of years ago which has likelihood of growing into a yearly custom. The Hillport Farm Products Company, dealing as it does with city consumers direct, had raised up among these a body of permanent customers, with something like intimacy of tie between buyer and seller, because of the personal nature of the transactions, the middleman being absent and producer and consumer thus being brought to look each other in the face.

It occurred to Bert Re Qua that it might be a profitable idea if the knot tying the people in this relationship could be drawn still closer. Therefore he got the Neighbourhood Association interested, and two years ago at Holiday time Hillport held a "Swiss Carnival." Invitations were sent to every one who had ever spent a summer in the town, also to all of the city customers of the Company. "Come out and see what the country looks like in snow-time." Something like fifty people, young and old, responded; some of the "colony" folk reopening their houses for the week.

Thereupon, over at Al Becker's farm by the creek and pond, was inaugurated a winter carnival. An impromptu toboggan slide was made out

on the hill on the turnpike back of his house. There were skee-jumping contests, skating on the creek and pond, old-fashioned sleigh rides at night, snowshoe parties, snow sculpture, and dinner parties a-plenty. To many it was a revelation of the joys that are in the country in winter, and it cemented more than one friendship between rural producer and city consumer, sweetening the commercialism of that relation with something of personal interest and recognition.

"Do you know, I like the green-gage marmalade and hickory-nut meats better, now that I've become acquainted with the homes where they are prepared and with the people who prepare them," was a remark overheard in the train, as the city people were returning home after the "Swiss Carnival."

"Yes," said the other. "And what a distinctive note there is in this village as a whole! The white colour that prevails so widely on the houses is more than quaint. And this double row of trees along the railroad! I am wondering what a building lot out here would cost."

"Don't know," replied the first. "But it's a question worth looking into. Do you know what impresses me most of all in this Hillport place?"

"No. What?"

"Why, Hillport impresses me as a place that is a country village and is perfectly content to be. Has no desire to ape city ways. It gives her a something of distinguishment, like the repose and quiet self-acceptance of a person of breeding as contrasted with the parvenu and the climber. For the first time I've met a people who believe that country life is just as rich and useful and grand a thing as city life. And it has given them a niche in my parthenon, now I can tell you."



CHAPTER XVII

I WAS at a meeting of the Neighbourhood Association; Bert Re Qua brought up a matter that had long been on his mind.

“If I have a correct notion of it,” said he, “the Hillport idea is that our community should be self-reliant; raise its own supplies; so far as practicable, be industrially self-sufficient. And, along many lines, we’ve done so. We grow our own fruit, fatten our own beeves, preserve our own vegetables, bake our own bread. We make our own shipping boxes. Yes, and provide our own schooling so that we no longer send our young

people away for an education, but other young people are beginning to come to us. However, there is one spot where we fall down. We haven't any printing plant. Oh, yes, we have the Hillport *Globe* job printing office. But we know what the *Globe* is. No need of mincing matters. Old Editor Vangosbeck will tell you himself that it's the most run-down, out-of-date proposition to be found in sixteen counties. Their press and cuts and wood-types did service, I suspect, back in Buchanan's day. The Farm Products Company uses a heap sight of printing; and more and more of it, too. But does anybody suppose we could place an order with this Hillport plant? Printing, of all things, must be modern; must have tone to it. I'd no more think of sending out a Hillport printed bulletin or circular to our customers than I'd ship them coal-tar strawberries or put our label on cold-storage poultry.

"Which means that a whole lot of good money is going out of the neighbourhood uselessly. And it's a nuisance besides. I can't get a quick piece of printing done, like business houses in the city. I have to get prices from the city. Send in the copy. Wait for proofs to be mailed back to me. Remail the proofs. Then sit down and whittle, while the stuff is reaching me. Hillport ought to have its own printing plant. But it would have

to be a high-grade affair — none of your cheap country printing. That kind of a plant would cost money. I've suggested to the Farm Products Company to take up the enterprise. But the directors don't feel equal to it. Some way, however, ought to be found."

Professor Engle arose and seconded Re Qua's remarks.

"It may sound strangely in your ears," said he, "but I would like nothing better than to have an artistic printer located in this town, a part of whose work would be to teach a class in printing in the public school. Oh, no, not as a trade school of printers' apprentices. I have in mind something far deeper than that. I covet it as the most practical method I know, of art instruction. People generally haven't awakened to that fact. But printing in our day is rapidly taking on the character of a fine art. I will venture the statement that there is more artistic feeling, creative zest, enthusiasm for taste and richness and beauty, going into the printing art to-day than into any other branch of our modern life.

"Emerson said that landscape art, because of the materials provided here in this new land, would probably be the distinctive American art. I differ from his judgment. I predict that printing is to be the distinctive American art. For of all the

arts, it is the most democratic. Yes, its one task is to be the purveyor of all the other arts, carrying them to the people in widest commonalty. To a printer fired with a worship of the beautiful, there is put into his hands to-day a wealth of resource unsurpassed by none of the other arts. In the handling of colour, in composition, in texture and style and a sense of the fitness of things, the printed page offers a possibility of artistic expression surpassed neither by the painter's canvas, the sculptor's marble, nor the chords and harmonics of the musician."

He was going on, but Mrs. Barie, who was present, could not wait for him to finish.

"But tell us, tell us," said she, "some practical way of going about the thing." It was a brand new idea to her, this idea that the printing art could be made into a training school in esthetics. And she took fire quickly. In fact, there was a bit of history back of this sudden burst of zeal. Hillport, not long before, had erected a new bridge across Vleetskill Creek. The old bridge had been a covered one of wood, and though not very stable, had really been an addition to the landscape, so finely did its simple, unpretentious lines blend with the countryside out of which it seemed to grow — yes, out of which it actually had grown, to every stone and beam and wooden pin in its make-up.

But an uncommonly severe spring freshet had undermined it. And in place thereof an iron bridge had been erected. But, oh such a bridge!

"The ugliest fabric ever perpetrated by the hand of man!" had been Mrs. Barie's pronouncement, the first time she saw it in its completed state. And time had but deepened that impression. It was a gawky mass of iron, stuck up in the air on stilts. Durable? Yes. And for that reason the more disheartening. "Oh, if high water could only reach it and wipe it from the face of the earth!" was the prayer of more than one who passed that way; and the route was a much traversed one, leading from the village over to Lime Kiln and Vroman's Nose. It looped itself in one monstrosity of a span, from shore to shore, for all the world like the hump of a camel; and in its unrelieved coat of brick-red, proclaimed its hideousness, like a caliope out of tune.

And this, mind you, just at a time when it was thought that Hillport had at last found itself, that it had come to a rebirth in loveliness and a sense of community art! The bridge company that inflicted this abortion upon the landscape was not wholly to blame, they had to undersell their competitors. The bridge commissioner couldn't see why the new structure wasn't all right: "A clear span now; it can't flood no more

water over onto Pindar's hop-yard." And most of the community had accepted it unquestioningly.

"It only goes to show," said Mrs. Barie with firmness, "that an instinct for beauty is one of the most difficult plants to naturalize in the human heart; needs constant water and cherishing, or it will die out."

Therefore, when on this meeting night in question Principal Engle expressed an expert's opinion that the printing art possesses more promise for educating the populace into an æsthetic sense than any other method he knew, her interest straightway took on keenest edge: "How could it practically be gone about?"

"Why, as to the practical steps," replied Engle, "that would be for the all-of-us to determine. For instance, I know of a fellow who would be quite the chap to take hold of such a work, provided we could get him. Some of you people must remember him — Clayton Snyder, one of our old Hillport boys. I used to see something of him when I was in editorial work. He's connected with one of the publishing houses in the city. He's an enthusiast on this subject. He read a paper some time ago before the American typographical convention on 'The Printer, the Artist of Democracy.'"

"But is he a practical man?" asked John Corbin,

getting up on his feet in order to command the meeting. "Because if this is to succeed, it would have to be by establishing not only a model printing plant here, but new-creating the weekly paper also. A number of us have long felt the need of an up-to-date newspaper for the town. And it's just possible that the present is the psychological moment."

Aunty Agnes got the floor, her face all wreathed with joy.

"Why just see!" said she. "Here is an undertaking that seems to be demanded by almost every sort of interest. The Farm Products Company wishes it, in order to get job printing of quality without sending to the city for it. Mr. Engle wishes it, as an adjunct to his school — a department in art training. Mrs. Barie wishes it, as a means of elevating the æsthetic standard of the public. Mr. Corbin wishes it, for the sake of a local newspaper worthy of the town. And maybe such an institution wouldn't help me, too, in my efforts to carry printed lore into the homes."

Spoke up Mrs. Barie: "If you'll make it a non-dividend affair, I'll subscribe for half the stock."

"As a matter of fact," said Hal Cushman, "a non-dividend stock for an enterprise of this sort is a contradiction of terms." He paused,

and with a quizzical countenance confronted them.

"Don't see why," spoke up his wife. "It could be agreed that all the earnings are to go back into the concern, to build up the paper and improve the plant."

"Quite so," explained Cushman. "And the more resources you supply to an enterprise like this, the more of value would it pour back into the community; and we'd all share in the civic dividend whether we wished to or not."

"Oh, men have such deep thoughts!" exclaimed his wife, amid the merriment.

Clayton Snyder, the former Hillport boy, was found to answer Corbin's demand for "a practical chap." As a matter of fact, he was foreman of the manufacturing department in the house where he worked, and only consented to come back to his native town when he found that there had taken place in the old village such a renaissance of community pride and loyalty that he would be churlish indeed to have refused.

"Hillport needs you," pleaded Engle, in his telegram. "The city there has loads of people doing for it what you are trying to do. But your native town, not one. Come." And he came.

The old Hillport sheet was bought out, Vangosbeck jumping at the chance to convert his "good

will" into cash — a thing, by the way, that he had not been able to do in a lifetime of somnolent perplexity. The old type was junked: "Just the stuff for melting in the monotype pot," remarked Snyder as he emptied the last shovelful of it into the scrap barrel. The only thing of Vangosbeck's plant that was retained in the new, was the composing stone. And even this wasn't good enough to be used for that purpose now, but was utilized as a table for blending inks.

The name of the paper was changed. The *Globe!* "How in the name of sense," queried Corbin, "was there use for a 'Hillport *Globe!*' Let the city papers take care of the world, and our own sheet cultivate the local spot of earth committed unto it. Here it need fear no competition, and will do a work that is being done by none other."

Therefore the name was changed to the Hillport *Weekly Rose*. "*Rose!*" Why not? As the Neighbourhooders said when hitting upon that title, "Periodicals have been christened after the names of hawks and eagles and rip saws and blades. Why not one named from the flower kingdom?"

As the name was peculiarly of local derivation, so was all the news that went into its columns. And all the copy received was likewise a native

product. The Neighbourhood Association determined that Hillport should raise up its own writers. "We'll not import boiler-plate to fill up our columns, nor a paper with patent insides," ran the memorandum which was spread on the minutes; "if we haven't got writers, we'll breed them." It was made known, therefore, that anything of, by, and for Hillporters would be welcomed for its columns. It gave no space discussing the personages of the grand world, but recorded with much gusto the achievements of the humblest son of Hillport, at home or abroad.

Snyder was not much of an editor, being more at home on the mechanical side of a paper. That is why he had been chosen for the job. So this is the way he did: Instead of writing editorials himself, he would drop a line by post to some Hillporter requesting him — quite as often her — to write a letter to the *Rose* on such or such a topic. It worked splendidly. Got the people to look to their paper as the medium of thought exchange, and is developing a taste for writing in more than one breast.

The Farm Products Company made it the channel of communication with their clientele. Instead of publishing a separate bulletin, it had a corner in the *Weekly Rose* where it announced its prices and offerings; and it put each of its customers on the subscription list. Thereby the

city consumer of Hillport's products came to have a knowledge of Hillport's life as a whole, and to take a local interest in the doings of the village whence came their potatoes and broilers and gooseberry jam.

The connection between the local weekly and the public school was particularly close. As per agreement, Clayton Snyder conducted a semi-weekly class there in the principles of art as taught by printer's craft. It was enforced constantly by samples of printing, good and bad, and was, as Engle had foretold, an education in taste. He who has been trained to recognize and abhor a gawky piece of printing, will also recognize and abhor a gawky iron bridge, and will demand that everything in his community contribute to civic art. The omnipresence of printer's type in our modern life was pointed out, and its possibilities as an instrument of artistic expression.

The whole trend toward art education in the public school was thereby furthered. The drawings of the pupils and their decorated manuscripts began to be reproduced in the paper. And these have increased both in quantity and artistic power until now they are given special attention in one issue every month. A small photo-engraving outfit has been established in the school, and the pupils are taught the art of tooling the plates

by hand. The Camera Club also provides material. The special issue of the paper containing these illustrations is known as the *Monthly Rose*, and is on calendered paper. Of course it can't compare with the metropolitan periodicals. It doesn't try to. Its pictures and drawings are often crude enough. But they are native products — a photo of some Hillport nook; a design by some Hillport youth. Whereby the community proudly can say with Touchstone, "Poor thing, but mine own."

Needless for me to state that the Hillport Printery, as Snyder's plant calls itself, is getting a name quite beyond the town's boundary lines. Its output has a something of distinctive quality, and is providing more and more a source of revenue. Instead of Hillport sending to outside places for her printing, outside places are beginning to send to her. As certain towns in Switzerland teach watchmaking to the people from childhood, and so have developed a deftness well-nigh congenital, so Hillport, unless all signs fail, is going to become a centre of printing regarded as art, as a pursuit indeed worthy an artist's full employ. She is going to contribute materially to elevate the standards of taste in this which promises to be perhaps the noblest of all the arts, because most lending itself to the uses of democracy.



CHAPTER XVIII

day appeared a letter in the *Weekly Rose* from a man named Danforth, something of a local scholar and antiquarian. It seems he had discovered that, two hundred years ago from that date, something important in the history of the town had happened. I have never been able to ascertain clearly just what it was. It was either the date of the town's founding by some Indian hunters, or the coming of the first white family, or the building of a fort, or the holding of the first church service; or something like that. (There have been hints that Danforth invented the

THE MIXING

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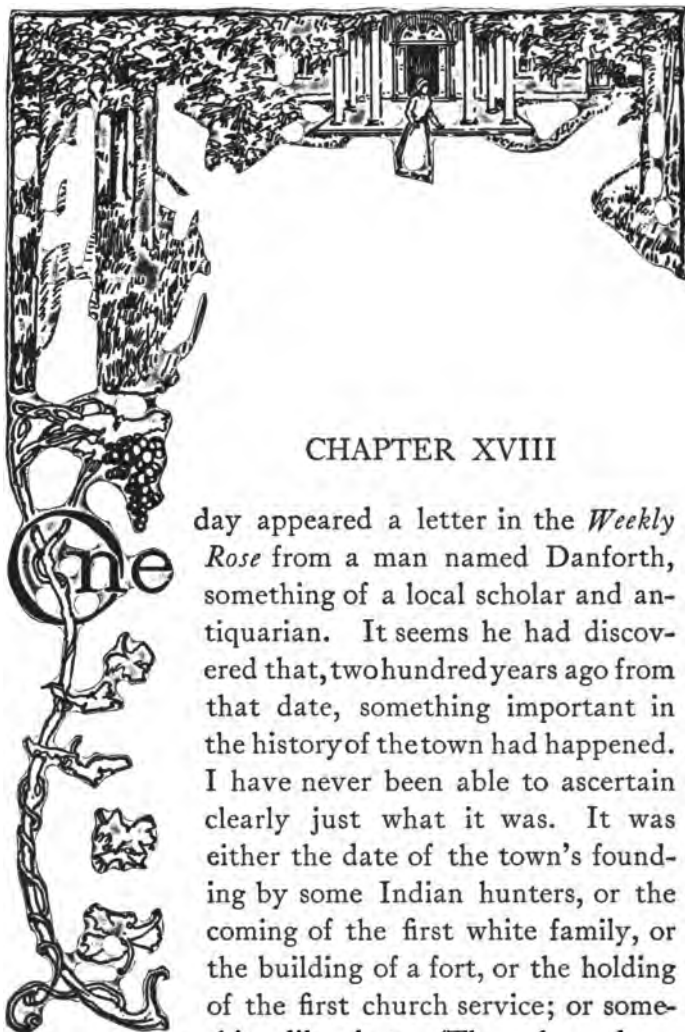
"Just the thing," exclaimed Mrs. Corbin, when the matter was broached at the next meeting of the Neighbourhooders. "We'll show the world what a real American village looks like."

"And we could have a fireworks display that would light up the county," suggested Jim Borst.

"Why, certainly," said Hendrick. "We couldn't have a bi-centennial without burning whole barrels of red fire."

The thing was quite to the temper of the meeting. They voted it as their sentiment that Hillport should have an Old Home Week, to celebrate the town's two hundredth anniversary. The proceedings were published in the next issue of the *Rose*. Letters from various citizens, voicing approval, poured in and were printed. A mass meeting was held in the clubhouse and a celebration was formally voted. A committee was appointed to have the thing in charge. They sent out an announcement far and wide, began a campaign for subscriptions to defray the expenditure and the thing was started.

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One of the people who were attracted back home by these preparations for the Old Home Week was Janet Blake. Her stay abroad had been of

longer duration than she had expected. Her father had been assuring her by letter of his continued health; even an improvement in his spirits, so he said. Therefore, she felt that she could prolong her absence, particularly as she felt the need of a change. For — to herself — she had to acknowledge that she was far from blithe. Yes, duration of time failed to restore her vivacity. In a letter from her father news reached her of the preparations for Hillport's grand event. And she came home.

Janet was immensely pleased on her return to find her father really improved in health. His eye had an unwonted clearness. And he leaned less upon his crutch when he walked. She knew nothing of his participation in the neighbourhood work, nor even that he had joined the association. For Old Man Blake was not given to write letters about his personal works of benevolence. "A perfect clam, that's what you are, when it comes to talking about yourself," Mrs. Corbin had exclaimed to him one day.

About a week after Janet's return, she was seated out on the piazza in the afternoon's heat, reading. Her father came out, and seated himself not far from her. He was uneasy, a thing unusual with Galusha Blake. There was apparently something on his mind that he wished to

utter, but didn't know just how to go about it. He started to speak once or twice, but each time turned it off into a cough. Finally, after fidgeting around in his chair an interminable space:

"Now, Janet, as to our going to church next Sunday — I suppose that — in fact, the pews as I understand are ——"

Janet looked up from her book with uncomprehending eyes. She had been reading "Lorna Doone." She found difficulty in bringing herself suddenly back into the present, and particularly the strange kind of present figured forth by these words of her father.

"As to our going to church?" said she, endeavouring to get some intelligible meaning out of the sounds which smote her ear. "Church, did you say? I was ——"

"Why, yes, yes," spoke up Blake, irritated at her slowness of comprehension. "It wouldn't be decent for us, you know, not to get into the life of the community. And the church is the natural centre for ——"

Janet let the book fall from her lap, her fingers too limp to restrain it.

"But are you well, daddy? Look at me. It's a warm afternoon, and you've ——"

Old Man Blake — he didn't seem so old this afternoon, for some reason or other — laughed a

long, hearty laugh, at the fear expressed by his daughter. "There you go, Janet. All the time imagining me to be an old man, and watching over me as if I was a bedridden invalid. Why, confound it! I'm not old," and picking up his crutch and cane he pranced across to the farther end of the piazza and back, more nimbly than Janet had seen him in years. "Guess that's spry enough, isn't it? Janet, your old dad has got a lot of years left in him yet. Mark you that. Why, didn't you hear that I was one of the Neighbourhooders? Come to think about it, guess I didn't tell you. I joined while you were away."

With one bound, she was at her father's side, threw her arms about his neck, smothered him with the vehemence of her caress, settled in his lap with very tears of joy.

"You a member of the Neighbourhood Association! And are willing to let me go to church — and you also! But tell me, tell me!" And she laughed in the midst of her rainy eyes, quite reckless, in the riot of emotions within her.

"Yep," said he, "I'm a Neighbourhooder. Why, the meeting was held at the house here. I'm surprised that I didn't think to write you about it. We had a bully time. And I've helped the work along, too, with a little boost here and there. Dagner wasn't at the meeting here. Prob-

ably he was busy that night. Of course, we must go to church. For one thing, it wouldn't be seemly if we ——"

"But, daddy, explain, quick! The church you say? I thought you didn't believe, and didn't wish me to, either."

"Why, Janet, of course I believe. The idea! Bless you, daughter mine, there's more things in this universe than what these clumsy eyes of ours can see. What is it that is working so mightily upon the minds of men, creating a grand new era in human affairs? Right here in our own Hillport, for instance, what is it that has got us people together when I'd have taken my oath, honest injun I would, that no power in the universe was strong enough to overcome the deadness. A Civic Presence ——"

But Janet did not hear him out.

"I must see Mr. Dagner" said she. "There are some things I want to tell him. You won't mind, daddy, will you, if I run away just a little while? I'll be back directly." And slipping on a sunbonnet, she went out through the great fine avenue of trees to the highway, and took her way swiftly — she knew not whether she was walking or running, so joyous was the mood of her — down toward the village, and the house where Dagner had his lodgings.

But her glad feet were destined to a rude check in their ongoings that happy afternoon. One of those strange unaccountable mischances that come to upset the best laid plans of mice and men.

She was rushing along gladly, with almost a song upon her lips — certainly one in her heart, — but as she approached the Straub house, where Dagner lived, she noticed a throng of people filling the lane and surrounding the house. A terrified crowd it was. She asked the first person she met; it was Mrs. Frisbie. And then heard the news. Dagner had been shot.

Becky Bush had done her deed. She never had forgiven Dagner for the part he had taken in her arrest for mistreatment of her child and in the taking away of Nellie by the society in the distant city. When she got out of jail, she had made request to the society for the return of Nellie, saying that she had now reformed, and was never going to be bad any more. They sent word to her through Dagner that if she would let morphine and whiskey alone one entire year, they would let her have Nellie back. She got along prosperously in this reform path, and it looked as though she was going to make good, would stick the year out and get her girl. But, a few days ago, the man she was living with had got drunk, and Becky had not been able to resist. She went on a ter-

rific spree. On this day in question, she saw Dagner walking along the road that climbed toward her house. She thought he was coming to find out about her lapse, to report to the society. As matter of fact, he had not heard of it; he was on his way to make a sick call farther on along that road. She waited his approach with a double-barrelled shotgun. When he had passed the house she stepped out with the tread of a cat, and shot him in the back. Thereupon she did the one graceful thing under the circumstances: She placed the other barrel to her neck, and blew her head off.

Dagner was taken to the village in an unconscious condition, on a stone boat. No other vehicle was to be found in that neighbourhood; there was no time to be lost. Therefore, hay was piled upon the boat, which had been discovered hitched up and at work in a neighbouring field. And on that for a bed he was brought to Hillport. Word had preceded his arrival. At the farther end of the iron bridge he was met by a wagon sent out to meet him, was transferred to it, and taken to the infirmary room in the village clubhouse, where Miss Brown, the nurse, received him until Doctor Rivenburg could arrive.

As the news spread, many of the people rushed to the Straub house, supposing him to have been



taken there. Others joined them. No one was permitted to see Dagner. And the people drew away from around the infirmary, so as not to permit any noise to beat into the room where he lay. They gathered around the Straub house, and this was the crowd Janet met.

She learned the particulars and returned home. Her father was still sitting on the piazza. He noticed that something was wrong, for he caught sight of Janet's countenance as she came up the driveway. His face went white:

"Why, Janet, what — what's the ——"

The walk home had been a hard one for her. She sank into a chair.

"Mr. Dagner is shot," was her announcement. "Becky Bush. He's just been brought home. Unconscious. On a stone boat."

"My God!" and her father raised his arms wildly. "Oh, Janet," he cried as he threw himself upon her and buried his face in her lap, in a flood of weeping; "oh, Janet, Dagner was the one who was giving me back my faith. Yes, I was beginning to believe once more. The first time since your mother's death."

He had to be carried to his bed that night. Crutch and cane were not sufficient to support the suddenly aged man that was Galusha Blake.



CHAPTER XIX



COURSE, all preparations for the Old Home Week were called off when Dagner was brought home, bleeding and nigh to death from the gun in the hands of that maniac woman. Hillport was in anything but a festive mood.

Doctor Rivenburg said it was Miss Brown's prompt attendance that saved Dagner's life, for he was rapidly passing from loss of blood. And had she not known how to staunch the flow before the doctor got there, life would probably have flickered out. As it was, he hung poised on the border line for some days. Oh,

what long days they seemed, to the people waiting for news!

But skill, and the splendid resistance power of the patient, won the day. A surgeon was summoned from the city. It was found that the shot had entered deeply, but had penetrated no vital organ. And if sepsis could be averted, there was hope. Dagner's excellent condition of blood, and the care with which he was attended, accomplished that victory. As soon as the shock had passed, and his system had regained a something of poise, the shot were removed. A few days later the bulletin announced that though George Dagner was a grievously wounded man, there was every expectation that he would recover.

Like the springing back of a long bent spring, once the tension that had held is released, so now. When this news was given unto it, Hillport went exuberant with joy. A Fête! They were in a mood now for a fête, the more so precisely because of the sudden dark that had gloomed over them ten days ago. The meeting of the Old Home Week committee that was called, as soon as the announcement arrived and they were permitted to resume the preparations that had been so brusquely interrupted, was of an enthusiasm not to be restrained. They took up the work where it had been left off. Volunteers carried on as

much of the church routine as could be handled in the absence of a minister. Morning services were omitted; but Janet Blake took charge of the Sunday school, in order that the break in the routine might be as slight as possible. Hillport resumed its life with a swing greater than before.

A town that sets out to show itself on a formal stated occasion to the world must fix up. "We've got to wash behind the ears, and put on our store clothes," said Bert Re Qua at a meeting of the Neighbourhooders.

Which brought up straightway the question of the billboards. Oh, those billboards! I haven't made mention of them prior to this time, but Hillporters had been making mention of them, good and proper. The town was cursed with them. Great glaring monstrosities, dealing one a blow in the face at every street corner and crossroads. The fences along the turnpike commanded the people to use Shakespeare Soap. Trees were turned into manikins bearing a sign-board, "Sampson Salve for Sore Feet." Travellers along the railroad, long before reaching Hillport, were informed from huge announcements in field and on the barn roofs, "People Die for Lack of It! Lack of What? Peter's Pop — the Beer that's Brewed with Brains." Whilst even the stones and rocks preached a homily on the su-

preme virtues of "Indian Ointment—Gift of the Gods to Suffering Mortals."

The Neighbourhooders had long had the thing in mind. But their energies had been required in civic tasks more fundamental; and nothing had been done. Now, however, with Old Home Week approaching, the thing had to be taken in hand. "Why, we'd be ashamed to invite people to Hillport, for them to learn, the first crack out of the box as they get off the train, that 'Equator Powders Make Pale People Pink—Twenty-five Doses for Twenty-five Cents,' remarked Corbin. And the rest thought so too. But what could be done?

"This can be done," said Engle: "We have established a channel of publicity whereby every legitimate commodity can present its claims to the suffrage of the people in due and seemly form. I refer to the Hillport *Weekly Rose*. Let the community tax all other forms of advertising to extinction."

"That sounds good," exclaimed Mrs. Barie. "In fact, too good, because other communities have wrestled with this problem painfully. Why the painfulness of their throes, if the thing is as simple as this?"

"I'll tell you why," spoke up Mrs. Corbin, who, child of nature that she was, raged mightily over

thing out of blue sky, in order to provide an excuse for a celebration.) He suggested that something ought to be done.

"Just the thing," exclaimed Mrs. Corbin, when the matter was broached at the next meeting of the Neighbourhooders. "We'll show the world what a real American village looks like."

"And we could have a fireworks display that would light up the county," suggested Jim Borden.

"Why, certainly," said Hendrick. "We could have a bi-centennial without burning whole barrels of red fire."

The thing was quite to the temper of the meeting. They voted it as their sentiment that the port should have an Old Home Week, to celebrate the town's two hundredth anniversary. The proceedings were published in the next issue of the *Rose*. Letters from various citizens, with approval, poured in and were printed. A meeting was held in the clubhouse and a resolution was formally voted. A committee was appointed to have the thing in charge. They put out an announcement far and wide, began a campaign for subscriptions to defray the expenses, and the thing was started.

One of the people who were attracted back by these preparations for the Old Home Week was Janet Blake. Her stay abroad had been

posed was found to be well-nigh prohibitory. The Junior Civic League was turned loose upon the community with axe and saw and paint pot, to destroy every sign that bore not a license number. And they did it, too, did these youngsters. "More fun than an Indian massacre," was their verdict, as they wielded the hatchet — they called it tomahawk — and made civic bonfires of the débris. Furthermore, the vigilance needed not long to be continued. Advertisers have a keen nose to detect the popular weather. They quickly found that, in Hillport at least, the road to favour was through another route than billboards.

That other civic deformity, the iron bridge, presented more difficulty. Various methods were suggested. One was to paint it some other colour than brick red. But the hideousness of the contour would still remain. Another suggestion was to encase the side railing in a solid parapet of cement, and thus relieve the impossible barrenness of the spectacle. Furthermore, it was thought that, by this means, the disproportionate height might be lessened, and the structure tied with a something of organic union to the cement abutments at each end. But it was found that this would be an expensive undertaking; opinions differed, moreover, as to the looks of the thing when completed.

In sheer desperation they did this: Ivy was set out, in rich beds of earth at both ends of the bridge, and the vines trained up on to the iron work. A large Grecian urn of cement was also affixed on each side of the bridge, midway. In these urns, likewise, ivy was planted and trained up along the beams and girders.

"It won't cost much," said Mrs. Cushman; "and failure therefore will not be disastrous."

But success instead of failure was the result. As if out of a perverse desire to disappoint the gloomy predictions that had been pronounced concerning it, the ivy — playful sprite — persisted in keeping alive and even in growing. It touched the angular, misshapen beams into a more pleasing softness. It festooned many a hard outline, draping the gawky curves, which man's brain had laid out, into its own nature-made lines and contour.

So that the Hillport bridge is no longer a sore spot, but is really one of the show places — a mass of verdure overarching the Vleetskill Creek, for all the world like some natural bridge blunderingly but beautifully eroded through rock or framed out of great leaning tree-trunks. Indeed, the bridge company — the Mallory firm, boys of Hillport origin — got out a photograph of it. (I have always believed that secretly they had

been ashamed of this output from their works.) The picture now occupies a place in their list-book.

To be sure, in winter the old ugliness reëmerges. But the people are so absorbed in skating underneath it that they have scant time to take in the disquieting sight above them. Furthermore, the vines along the iron work help the snow to cling to it. So that now and then, of a winter's morning, the bridge is a lace-work of white which people go some distance to see.

Hillport was now in fit condition to entertain guests. "We've opened up the parlour and got on our company manners," said the irrepressible Bert; "we've blacked the stove, mopped the stoop, brushed our hair, and put on our best bib and tucker. Guess we're ready."

The class in designing, at the school, had gotten up a poster advertising "Hillport's Old Home Week." This was made the front cover of a souvenir announcement, and mailed far and wide. Also a stick-stamp symbolizing the event had been gotten out. The people pasted these on their outgoing letters. The Farm Products Company pushed the announcement upon their city clientele. Every person who had once stepped foot inside the town, and whose address could be found, was reached with an invitation.

A proposal was made to erect some imitation

trophy pillars to form a colonnade along Railroad Avenue, to welcome the guests. But Engle, as member of the Committee of Twenty-five, pleaded: "Why not put in something permanent, which will remain as a memorial of the event?" His suggestion was adopted and a public fountain decided upon. In the centre of what was until then a dusty plaza in front of the depot, a plot was parked and the fountain there erected. The design for the fountain was the patron flower of the town — a rose in blossom, done in whitest marble. To finance it, the committee pledged its personal credit, trusting to the liberal spirit of the sons of Hillport when they should all have been assembled.

Monday of Old Home Week began a six days' programme of doings both serious and festive. The band played each afternoon and evening from the clubhouse balcony. Every morning the people were awakened by the strain of "Home Sweet Home" from the chimes, which also played each noon hour and at six in the evening, patriotic, popular, and devotional airs. Tuesday night witnessed a chorus of the school children. "Music in the air" one of the homecomers described it, so predominant was music as a feature of the week's doings. Wednesday afternoon was given over to literary exercises. Danforth read a paper

on the history of the village. The unveiling of the fountain occupied Thursday. As the covering was withdrawn and the petals unfolded their lovely whiteness to view, many were the exclamations of delight, and the more so because Hillport had dared to depart from beaten tracks. Then, as the water was turned on and the expanded rose looked out through a veil of shimmering mist, it was seen to be a veritable work of art, and subscriptions came copiously to defray the cost.

An extraordinarily interesting ceremony took place the next day, Friday. Welly Bassler lived on a farm on the outskirts of the village. Adjoining his place was the ruins of the stone fort that had been built back in Indian times. Now Bassler had been decidedly the gainer by the surge of neighbourhood life which had made Hillport at last into a civic personality endowed with conscience and mind and will. To be sure, some of his trade, such as canned goods, patent medicine, and Western butter, had been destroyed. But not at all to the diminishing of his happiness — or income. Because now there was a stir of industry everywhere in the town, so that people had money wherewith to pay their debts. He collected store bills which he had marked off from his books as worthless.

Therefore, he showed his Hillport spirit by

making a contribution to the community life. He bought the site of the fort, and presented it to the town. The Neighbourhood Association did its part by rebuilding the structure as nearly as possible in its original state, even to the wooden palisade that had girt it.

A public path was secured leading to the fort. This was obtained by joining a number of farm lanes. The title to the lane remained in the farmers' hands. But the community, by easing the owner of any liability for negligence damages, obtained permission to traverse it. And signs were put up announcing the semi-public nature of this route. Indeed, this system of private roads promises, from this as a beginning, to be greatly extended in the near future, because the increasing use of the highways by automobiles is creating a demand for country lanes where horseback riders and pedestrians can find seclusion and romance. Therefore these bridle paths, leisurely winding in and out among the fields and crossing brooks by means of stepping stones, are rapidly increasing.

After the fort had been rebuilt and the pathway to it opened, a request was sent out to the community to make this historic spot a public repository for all articles which in any way memorialized the past. With fine spirit the people

responded. They made it a museum of Hillport antiquities. Old flint-lock muskets, warming pans, spinning wheels, woodcuts and prints, foot warmers — a surprising array of mementoes — were evoked by this call, and placed, each with its donor's name, in the building.

On this Friday afternoon of Old Home Week the fort was formally opened to the public. A musical and literary programme had been prepared by the school children, the band lent its exuberant presence to enliven the occasion, and Bassler read the presentation address. This parked enclosure within easy reach of the village promises to be an addition to the zest of life in Hillport, because formerly the only outlet for a Sunday afternoon wall had been the cemetery up at Bull's Head.

Saturday afternoon saw a series of tableaux down at the bathing beach. They portrayed the history of the village in dramatized form. One saw the coming of the first white men, and their amicable reception by the Indians. Then a trading scene of the old Dutch days, dickering with the aborigines for pelts. The departure of some Hillport men for the Continental army was shown, with Colonial matrons and maids weeping sad farewells. Up to modern times was the series brought — up to the minute, indeed. The last scene was a tableau symbolic of the triumph

of democracy over class stubbornness and lethargy.

A Grand Pageant took place in the evening. It was a procession of floats, Main Street being ablaze with glory for the event. One float was a facsimile of the fort that stood in the town, back in Indian days. Another was a large model of the first church building; Brother George Vroman had built it, from an old drawing, and rode in person, personating the reverend pastor of that day. One float commemorated the soldiers that Hillport has given to the nation, in the various wars. A series of emblematic floats symbolized the institutions of the town — the home, the church, the school, the railroad, the summer resort life.

The Farm Products Company had prepared a series of floats representing the crops grown by the neighbourhood, Pete Mattice having laid himself out to make it the star feature of the parade. A huge chicken came first. It was of papier maché, made by pasting alternate layers of newspapers and flour paste over a framework of hoop iron, and left there until the "Chicken" had hardened and could stand alone, whereupon it was taken off and painted by the art class in the school. In similar fashion a cow had been fabricated, and now came in stately processional. There was an

enormous ear of corn, dressed up as a king. His consort was a cucumber — I am speaking literally. And there was a troop of attendants in the shape of butter beans and a roly-poly happy-faced potato. The clown was a monstrous onion shedding abundant tears, but very healthy and prosperous looking, nevertheless. While from atop the automobile truck, arranged for the occasion into a triumphal car, the band blared forth a clash and burst of jubilation.

rific spree. On this day in question, she saw Dagner walking along the road that climbed toward her house. She thought he was coming to find out about her lapse, to report to the society. As matter of fact, he had not heard of it; he was on his way to make a sick call farther on along that road. She waited his approach with a double-barrelled shotgun. When he had passed the house she stepped out with the tread of a cat, and shot him in the back. Thereupon she did the one graceful thing under the circumstances: She placed the other barrel to her neck, and blew her head off.

Dagner was taken to the village in an unconscious condition, on a stone boat. No other vehicle was to be found in that neighbourhood; there was no time to be lost. Therefore, hay was piled upon the boat, which had been discovered hitched up and at work in a neighbouring field. And on that for a bed he was brought to Hillport. Word had preceded his arrival. At the farther end of the iron bridge he was met by a wagon sent out to meet him, was transferred to it, and taken to the infirmary room in the village clubhouse, where Miss Brown, the nurse, received him until Doctor Rivenburg could arrive.

As the news spread, many of the people rushed to the Straub house, supposing him to have been

taken there. Others joined them. No one was permitted to see Dagner. And the people drew away from around the infirmary, so as not to permit any noise to beat into the room where he lay. They gathered around the Straub house, and this was the crowd Janet met.

She learned the particulars and returned home. Her father was still sitting on the piazza. He noticed that something was wrong, for he caught sight of Janet's countenance as she came up the driveway. His face went white:

"Why, Janet, what — what's the ——"

The walk home had been a hard one for her. She sank into a chair.

"Mr. Dagner is shot," was her announcement. "Becky Bush. He's just been brought home. Unconscious. On a stone boat."

"My God!" and her father raised his arms wildly. "Oh, Janet," he cried as he threw himself upon her and buried his face in her lap, in a flood of weeping; "oh, Janet, Dagner was the one who was giving me back my faith. Yes, I was beginning to believe once more. The first time since your mother's death."

He had to be carried to his bed that night. Crutch and cane were not sufficient to support the suddenly aged man that was Galusha Blake.

fears concerning the absentee, were in no mood. Instead he employed his time in telling, very simply, the story of the life of Oberlin, the man who, a hundred years ago, went up into that Ban-De-La-Roche wilderness in Alsace-Lorraine and laboured there for sixty years, succeeding where other ministers had abandoned the post in despair. He told of the backwardness of that region, its poverty of material resources, the uncivilization of its people. And then of the entrance of Oberlin there, the fine young minister of commanding presence and university training unto whom many a city pulpit would have opened, but who gave himself to that mountaineer settlement of Waldbeck.

He told how Oberlin with his own hands helped to build a wagon road connecting that district with the outside world, and to throw bridges across the stream; of the work he did in improving the agriculture of the people, importing new crops and generating an interest in fruit culture. He read this rule which Oberlin laid down as one of the parish regulations: "No lad should be received for confirmation without a certificate from his parents that he had planted and cared for two fruit trees in a suitable and designated place."

Nor did he forget to mention the man's fine enthusiasm for liberty; and the asylum he pro-

vided, there in that retreat among the Volges Mountains, for the heroes of the French Revolution when zeal for the cause drove them from their homes. He closed with a description of Waldbeck — the new Waldbeck — when Oberlin had finished his work.

No word of reference to Dagner; but on that account the more effective. The people felt that perhaps they had been listening to something of a parting word concerning their own minister. They had known for several weeks that all was not well in that sickroom. Doctor Rivenburg hadn't said much, but they discerned from his face and sobered air that he was worried.

The people on this Sunday morning discussed it. After the church service was over they went out into the dooryard, and stood in groups. Janet Blake was late in coming, so that Sunday school had not yet begun. The day was crystalline, and they preferred, young and old, to wait out in the open. They talked together of the Oberlin address they had just listened to, and of Dagner. A few expressed the fear that was cold at their hearts. Some words lately of the doctor were mentioned. Corbin said that he had asked him narrowly, and that Rivenburg had confessed as follows: "Something about this case is very confusing. Yes, we'll need all the specialist

aid you can get. His wound is healed, but he hasn't got spirit any more."

"There comes Rivenburg now," said Cushman, to whom Corbin had been narrating the matter. "We'll demand of him the whole truth." The doctor was driving up toward them at a sharp pace.

"He hasn't the face of a worried man," added Cushman, observing him anxiously. And it was true. Rivenburg's countenance was anything but dismal. He was laughing heartily to himself, and slapping his knee with the hand that was free from the reins. He turned out from the road and drove up into the yard where the people were standing.

"How is he?" they asked.

"I've come to say that there won't be any Sunday school to-day," he announced, and then burst into violent laughter, slapping his knees with both hands, now that he had relinquished the reins. The eyes of Corbin and Cushman met. Could it be that Rivenburg's mind was touched?

"None to-day," repeated the doctor, as the people crowded around his buggy. And again he bubbled with merriment.

"But what has that got to do with Mr. Dagner's condition?" asked Corbin.

"Why, that chap Dagner is going to get well, sure as Christmas. Lord, what a fool I was!"

And once more he went off into a fit of amusement. "You remember, I told you the other day that I was bothered over his case?"

Yes, Corbin remembered it distinctly.

"Well, I've located the seat of trouble. I thought it was the blow to his spine; but it was nothing of the sort. You see, I'd been keeping everything from him, so as not to let his mind get working. But this morning I thought I'd try another tack. So I said, 'Mr. Dagner, isn't there somebody you'd like to talk with, for a few minutes?' No, he guessed there was nobody he very much cared to see. And he settled back wearily in his chair, and my heart also inside of me.

"But I started in again. I was bound I'd try it. See if news of things wouldn't maybe jar him back into life once more. So I told him about the doings in the town this past week: the rose fountain, the fort, the church service arranged for this morning and how well the Sunday school was getting on under Janet Blake. He stopped me. 'Sunday school?' said he. 'You say that Miss Blake is taking charge of——?' 'Sure thing,' said I, 'and she's a winner at it, too. You aren't needed any more.'

"Well, sir, he rose right up, George Dagner did, straight as you or I be. 'Janet Blake has been taking that work and you never told me?

She was away from town when my accident happened. And I thought—why, you thundering idiot! Of course there's some one I wish to see.' And he went to the telephone to call her. Say, when a sick man calls his doctor a thundering idiot, there's hopes for him. Always. Have never known it to fail.

"Well, Janet Blake came. And upon my word I never saw a — say ——" And the doctor went off into a merriment that shook him from toe to top. "Why, I never even suspected it. I swan I didn't. Say, why didn't some lunkhead among you tell me?"

"And he can see people now?" queried Mrs. Corbin, with eyes a-sparkle.

"See people? Of course he can see people. At any time. The whole kit of you. Right now if you want to."

Mrs. Corbin started thither almost in a trot. The rest followed — an eager, hurrying, palpitant throng.

All the dooryard in front of Straub's house was filled by them, and out into the lane. When Dagner appeared on the front stoop, pale and meagre of flesh, but erect and with something of the old-time firmness in his stride, a cheer went up, a general pushing forward to clasp his hand. Tony Rebito went everywhere, hopping and skipping,

and adding to the general hilarity. It was indeed a joyous occasion for Rebbitto, because Nora had told him that she wouldn't think of being married by any other than Mr. Dagner; and Tony had been pestering Doctor Rivenburg almost daily for news of the patient. So that now he was utterly beyond control. In his perambulations he came across his future father-in-law and in a burst of expansive affection threw his arms around him. O'Flaherty said, "Damn!" but that was because there was a choke in his throat, and he had to say something.

Nobody noticed it however. Everybody was chattering at once. In the hubbub, Galusha Blake lost his crutch; in the excitement he forgot about it, and wiggled around with only his cane to lean upon. The crutch was found and restored to him a day or two later; but by that time he had got used to walking without it, and didn't need it any more.

One of the choir started to sing the first verse of "Hillport." That was a song that had been composed some time before. The *Weekly Rose* had offered a prize for the best song to serve as Hillport's hymn. Auntie Agnes had won it, by these words, set to the tune "America." And now, as the first stanza rang out, the rest, little by little, joined in, until all were singing it:

THE MIXING

"Hillport, we sing thy praise,
 Through all our length of days,
 We'll live for thee.
 Our tongues shall spread thy fame;
 Guard it from breath of shame,
 We'll ever laud thy name,
 And faithful be.

Thy fields so green and fair,
 Calm nights and purest air,
 Are full of health.
 Thy children love thee well,
 The hills and woodland dell
 Have cast on us their spell —
 Home's priceless wealth.

During the singing of these stanzas Dagner had been beckoning to some one inside the house to come out, but without success. Therefore he disappeared within for a moment, and the singing paused. It looked as though he would be unsuccessful; but at last, apparently in order not to delay the singing longer, Janet Blake came out with him, reluctant, led by the hand. Again the shout, and again the singing:

The city with its roar
 Heaps high its golden store,
 But here is peace.
 With grace and loveliness,
 With strength and gentleness,
 God shall thy children bless,
 Till time shall cease.

Our hearts shall here abide;
 To serve, shall be our pride —
 Fidelity!

Hillport knows rich nor poor;
Her faith is broad and sure,
And ever shall endure —
Democracy!

That Sunday evening Bill Van Wormer and Captain Paul were visiting with Jim Borst back by the latter's chicken run. As they sat smoking together, the chimes rang out, swelling over the landscape and out upon the bay. They listened in silence while the strains, "America," throbbed and thrilled through the evening air. The hymn put Bill into meditative mood.

"Men," said he, after the music had died away, "do you recollect years ago how there was a club of boys, the Harum-Scarums, and they got into bad ways? Well, one of them was Lynes, a nephew of mine, who delivered the oration this morning. And do you know what got hold of that lad and made him into a man? Well, it wasn't any preaching or lecturing to him, but Parson Dagner got him to be president of that boys' club over in the gymnasium. That's what was the making of Briggs Lynes."

"Yes, and you Cracker Barrels did your worstest to put a spoke in the wheel of the Neighbourhood Association when they was trying to start boys' clubs and such like, for the good of the town," said Captain Paul.

— "Put a spoke in nobody's wheel," insisted Bill,

nettled. "All we was trying to do was to keep 'em from makin' mistakes. As soon as we saw they were in earnest, we got in and pushed things through. Didn't we, Jim?"

"See here," said Jim, "don't you put me in with that Cracker Barrel crowd. How they can sit there day after day and waste time is more than I can see. I've got chickens."

THE END

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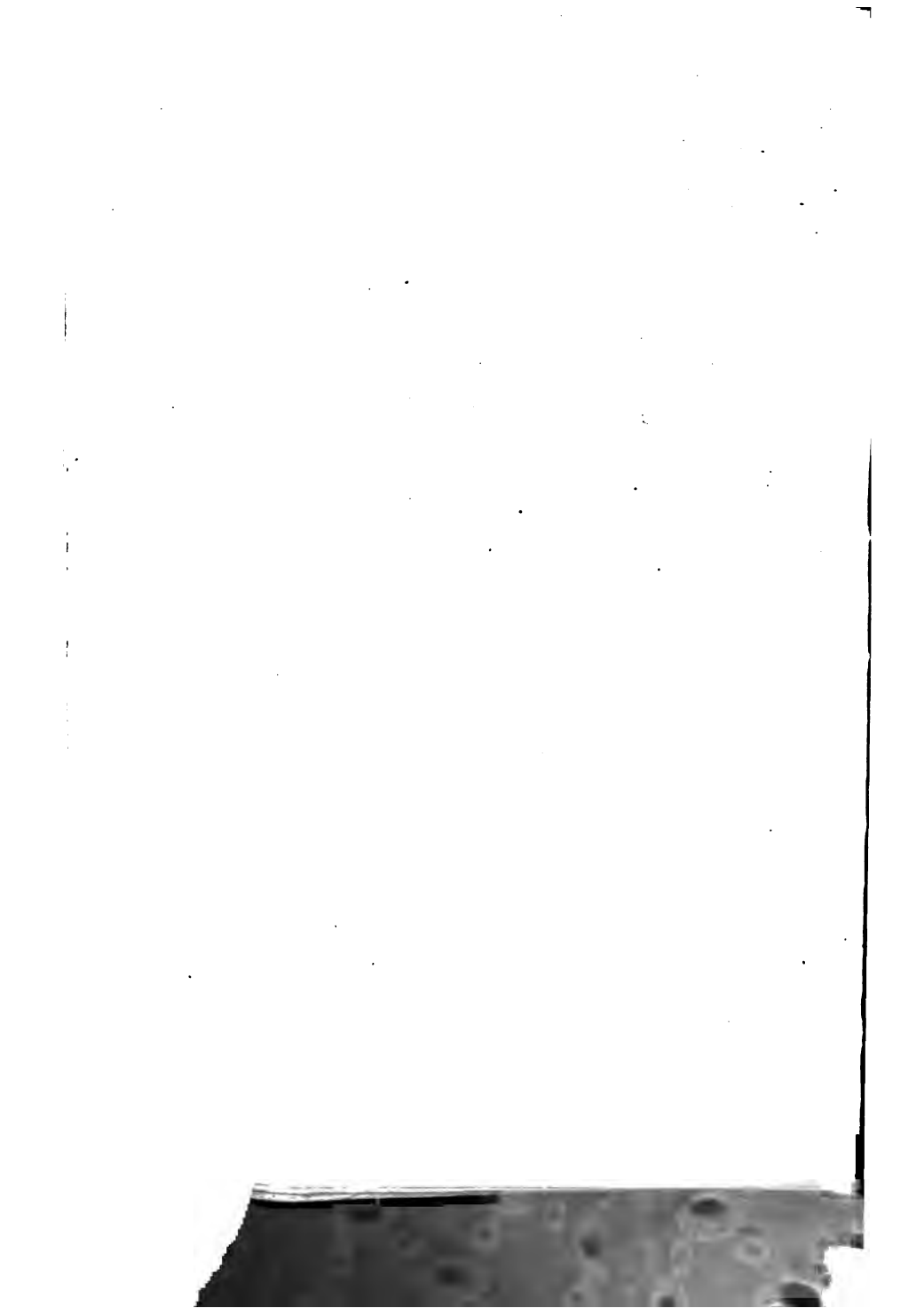
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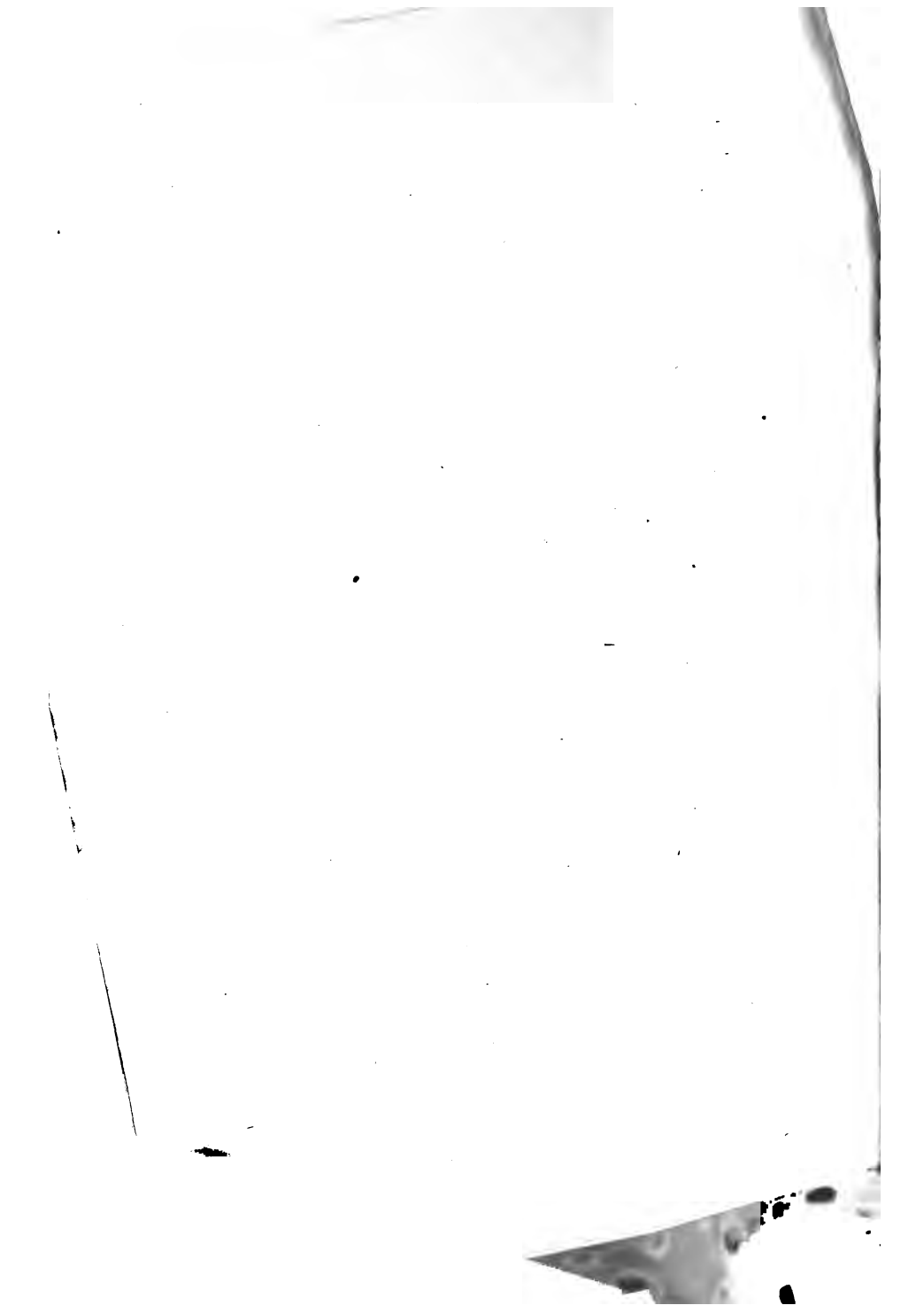
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